Auch hierfür sei ein letztes Mal Gunther von Patins zitiert, der diese Denkwiswe geradezu programmatisch ausspricht. Für ihn war der Erfolg des Kreuzzugs ein «Ratschluß der Güte Gottes, die mit dieser Entwicklung beabsichtigte, das uns seines Reichtums willen so hochführende Volk aus diesem seinem Überschwang hinunterzutreiben und es wieder zum Frieden und zur Einrichtung mit der heiligen allgemeinen Kirche zu bringen [...]. Dazu kommt auch als gewiß bedeutend, daß die oft genannte Stadt, die gegen die Pilger stets treulos gewesen war, [...], treu und einmütig bleiben und uns zur Niederkämpfung der Barbaren und zur Besetzung und Behauptung des Heiligen Landes infolge ihrer größeren Nähe um so wichtiger Hilfe leisten wird. Das alles würde gewiß hinfällig werden, wenn dieses Volk durch Menschen eines anderen Glaubens, etwa Heiden oder Häretiker, bewun gen würde oder gar, was das Schlimmste wäre, zu deren Irrglauben übertritte [...]. Und ich glaube, es ist nur durch ein sichtliches Wunder der göttlichen Gnade möglich geworden, daß diese schwerbefestigte Stadt, der ganz Griechenland zu Diensten stand, so ungestört, so vor aller Welt und so leicht in die Hände von wenigen gegeben wurde.»


...
Yet the accident theory also has a particular weakness: it follows exactly the argument of the main contemporary apologists for the actions of the Fourth Crusade, Geoffroy de Villehardouin. Himself a participant in the expedition and a confidant of some of its leaders, Villehardouin presented the progress of the crusade as a series of unfortunate accidents which all turned out to the good by the grace of God. To accept that version at face value is unconvinving in the extreme and invites a reappraisal of the events leading up to April 1204.

This article will place those events in the wider context of the previous century of crusading, during which western efforts first to conquer and then to hold the city of Jerusalem had been constantly hampered by the difficulty of supplying their armies. Far from being an accident, the sack of Constantinople was merely the last and most spectacular of the failures of crusade leaders to tap the resources of the Byzantine empire for what they saw as the pious duty of all Christians.

Those earlier historians who saw the sack of Constantinople as the outcome of worsening east-west relations always encountered some difficulty in knowing where to begin. Some saw it as the culmination of a process that began as far back as 1054, while others pointed to the arrival of the First Crusade at Constantinople in 1096 as the beginning of the trouble. Still others claimed that the coup d'etat of the supposedly anti-Latin Andronicus Comnenos in 1182 began the slide towards catastrophe.4 There is, however, one date that has been consistently ignored: 2 October 1187 when Saladin recaptured Jerusalem, in the wake of his victory at Hattin the previous July. Not surprisingly, the news of the disaster was greeted with outrage and grief in western Europe.

Europe and the bull Audita tremendi was issued by Pope Gregory VIII to call for a new crusade to retake the Holy City.5 Those who responded to this and subsequent calls to arms, however, can hardly have been blind to the difficulties of the undertaking. Although the First Crusade had enjoyed spectacular success against all the odds, those who participated in it had undergone tremendous hardship, usually as a result of shortage of food. During the siege of Antioch in 1097-1098, they had been reduced to eating thistles and leaves, and to stewing the skins of horses and asses.6 The Second Crusade of 1147-1148 had enjoyed much less success but had encountered the same problem, the French and German contingents being reduced to virtual starvation as they marched across Asia Minor.7

It was not that the crusaders had not anticipated the likelihood of supplies running short. On the contrary they had planned for it by choosing a route across Christian territory and negotiating in advance with the ruler of that territory, the Byzantine emperor, so that they would supply them with whatever they needed on the journey. The participants in the First Crusade were under the impression that the emperor would come with them by land and sea, that he would faithfully afford us a market by land and sea, and that he would diligently make good our losses.8 In the case of the Second Crusade, a treaty had been made beforehand between the king of France and the Byzantine emperor whereby, in return for an undertaking not to attack Byzantine territory, the Byzantines promised that adequate supplies would be provided for the French army.9

Precisely what went wrong with these arrangements is not entirely clear. Part of the problem was no doubt the sheer size of the armies passing through Byzantine territory which must have put immense strain on the available food supplies, while inevitably there were some individuals who were tempted to cheat the crusaders by selling them inferior goods at inflated prices.10 It would also seem, however, that the Byzantine emperors, fearful that these massive forces might pose a threat to Constantinople, were not averse to restricting the availability of food. They also tended to lead the crusaders to fend for themselves once they were safely across the Bosporus and no longer a daquer.11 Not surprisingly, these

4 Antonin, Historia de expeditione Friderici imperatoris, a.ca. 1150, Quellen zur Geschichte des Knesigten Kaiser Friedrichs I. MGH, Scriptores Rerum Germanicum, 5, Berlin 1928, 11-115, at 6-10.
6 Gregorii Francornae, 12.
7 Ibid., 24-29.
8 Ibid., 15.
9 Ibid., 41.
10 Ibid., 64-68, 94-101.
tactics did not make the Byzantines popular with the crusaders. Western chronicles of the time tended to portray the Grecians as treacherous and duplicitous and to blame them for any disaster such as the massacre of the followers of Peter the Hermit in 1096 and the failure of the Second Crusade.12

Those who answered the call for a crusade to recover Jerusalem after 1187 were faced with the same problem of how to supply their expeditions. One answer was to avoid Byzantine territory altogether. This was the option taken by the kings of France and England, Philippe Auguste (1180-1223) and Richard the Lionheart (1189-1199) in 1191 when they travelled to the Holy Land by sea from Marseilles during the Third Crusade. That did not tackle the root of the problem, however. The fact was that the primitive economies of western Europe had no real means of providing the money to equip, transport and feed large armies in a field of action far from home. In a feudal society, taxes were almost unknown so that the attempt to levy the 'Saladin tithe' in England and France in 1188 met with deep resentment and was sometimes impossible to collect. Instead, most crusaders simply paid their own way, with the result that often means that they ran short of funds and were unable to stay in the field. The experience of Jean de Joinville on the Seventh Crusade was no doubt a common one on earlier expeditions. Joinville had undertaken to pay not only his own expenses but also those of eleven other crusaders. Unfortunately, he ran out of money when the army had only travelled as far as Cyprus and he had to be rescued by a gift of eight hundred livres from the king of France.13 No wonder that in his letters, sent back to the west in 1191-1192, Richard the Lionheart begged that further supplies and money be sent.14

By the 1190s, three powerful rulers seem to have come to the conclusion that there was only one solution. There was a Christian society which did have the sophisticated financial apparatus needed to raise large sums of money to pay for a major long-range military expedition. It boasted a money economy and its ruler enjoyed the revenue of taxes regularly collected and payable in gold. This was, of course, the Byzantine empire and the conclusion seems to have been that it was incumbent upon the Byzantines to disgorge some of this wealth to assist the crusading effort and thus make up for their neglect in supplying earlier crusades. If they failed to do so then it would be legitimate to use force against them. The three rulers who adopted this view were Richard the Lionheart, the German emperor Henry VI (1190-1197) and Pope Innocent III (1198-1216).

Richard's extortions of resources from Byzantium took the form of the invasion and occupation of the Byzantine island of Cyprus in June 1191. The ostensible reason for Richard's action was outlined in a letter which he sent back to his justiciar in England: Isaac Komnenos, the ruler of the island, had imprisoned and maltreated the crews of some of Richard's ships which had been wrecked on the coast of Cyprus while the English fleet was sailing towards the Holy Land. Such provocation could hardly go unanswered so Richard landed his army, defeated Isaac and occupied the island.15

Yet it is clear that there was much more to the episode than that. Contemporary accounts from Richard's camp all comment that Cyprus was a wealthy island and that the booty amassed by the victorious Richard was considerable.16 That wealth would be of immense value to the crusade for, as the anonymous Itinerarium Peregrinorum makes clear, Richard took from the island 'everything necessary for his expedition as if it had been collected for him.17 Although the king kept the gold, silk and jewels that he captured for himself, he passed on the silver to his men and to the hard-up king of Jerusalem, Guy de Lusignan.18 In this way, Richard was using the proceeds from the conquest of Byzantine territory to enable other crusaders to equip themselves for the field.

The conquest of Cyprus aided the crusade in another way. As the anonymous author of the Itinerarium pointed out, the island was close to the Syrian coast and in the past Jerusalem 'used to receive no little benefit each year' from that quarter.19 This was probably a reference to the food supplies that were

13 Jean de Joinville, Histoire de St Louis, a cura di N. DE WALLE, Paris 1874, 48.

17 SVEIN, I, 204: » nec omnibus expeditionis necessaria tamquam etiam procuturis diripitur.«
19 STRASS, I, 383: »Vexum omnis praedicta unum emis secus superbus, de insula diu Cypro, de qua non excediam sensa Jerusalem suasque consuerat auxilium emolumentum.«
exported from Cyprus to Syria. At the time of the First Crusade's march on Jerusalem in 1098-1099, for example, considerable quantities of fruit and wine had been dispatched to the army from Cyprus by the exiled patriarch of Jerusalem. That Richard was well aware of the potential of his new conquest as a supply base is suggested by his decision to leave some of his men behind when he departed for Acre. Their job was to collect barley, wheat, sheep and cattle and send them on to the main army. Cyprus was, moreover, to prove an important supply base for future crusades.

One account of the conquest of Cyprus places the question of supply at the very centre of the narrative. According to this version, once Richard had landed, he met with Isaac Komnenos and upbraided him for standing by and doing nothing while Jerusalem had been seized by Saladin. He demanded that the Greek ruler make amends by joining the expedition to the Holy Land and by providing licences for all participants to buy food in Cyprus. Isaac excused himself from accompanying Richard to Acre, but he did promise to make the food available and to supply troops, terms upon which he later reneged.

The extortion practised by Henry VI was much more direct. Having taken the cross at Bari on Good Friday 1195, Henry may well have pondered on the experience of his father, Frederick Barbarossa, who during his crusade in 1189-1190 had had to defeat a Byzantine army in battle before the necessary supplies were provided. Henry therefore decided to deal with the matter in advance and sent envoys to Constantinople to deliver what amounted to an ultimatum. According to the Byzantine chronicler, Niketas Choniates, his ambassadors laid claim to all the land between Dyracchion on the Adriatic and the city of Thessalonica, a demand that they must have known the Byzantines could not possibly accede to. It would seem, therefore, that the land claim was merely a threat to force the Byzantines to give Henry what he really wanted.

finance and assistance for his forthcoming crusade. Choniates describes how Henry's representatives not only demanded an annual payment of five thousand pounds of gold at the price of peace but also 'help for his countrymen in Palestine by the sending out of ships'. As Charles Brand has pointed out, the sum demanded from the Byzantines was exactly that which Henry had elsewhere stated that he needed to maintain in the Holy Land and army of fifteen hundred knights and fifteen hundred sergeants. Henry's premature death on 28 September 1197 saved the Byzantines from having to hand over the tribute. Nevertheless, the episode illustrates very clearly how Byzantine wealth was now seen as an essential ingredient in a successful crusade strategy.

Finally, there was Pope Innocent III. The theory that Innocent somehow deliberately diverted the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople in order to subjugate the city to Roman ecclesiastical dominance has long since been discredited. Nevertheless, the pope, like other crusade leaders, clearly considered that the Byzantine empire had a moral obligation to support the enterprise. In 1199 Innocent had written to the Byzantine emperor, Alexios III Angelos (1189-1203), and told him in no uncertain terms that it was his Christian duty to use his abundant resources to assist the cause of the crusade. He later told the same emperor that he should not wait for divine providence to secure the restoration of Jerusalem to Christian rule but instead should play an active part in it.

The question remained, however, of what was to happen if the Byzantine emperor did not fulfil his duty and failed to provide help and supplies for the crusade. Innocent had prepared for that eventuality. In June 1203, he drew up a set of instructions for the leaders of the Fourth Crusade. Anticipating that the army might run short of food, as previous expeditions had, Innocent undertook to write to the Byzantine emperor and to ask him to make the necessary supplies available. If, however, the emperor, like his predecessors, failed in this respect, Innocent had his response ready:

«If, perchance it happen that these supplies are denied you, because you have sworn yourselves to the public service of the Crucified One,

24 A. Forsey, Cyprus as a base for crusading expeditions from the west, in N. Corner, J. Riley-Smith (a cura di), Cyprus and the Crusades, Nicosia 1995, 69-79, at 75; N. Corner, To what extent was the Crusaders' capture of Cyprus impelled by strategic considerations, in E. Feresin 1992, 197-202; P. W. Edbury, The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191-1707, Cambridge 1991, 74-100; J. A. Brunt, Richard the Lion-Heart and Byzantium, in Studies in Medieval Culture 6-7 (1978), 63-70, at 66.
26 Brand, Byzantium Conquests, 186-188.
27 Chuquet, L. 475-480; Brand, Byzantium Conquests, 193-194.
29 Die Register Innocenzi III, a cura di O. Hagenhuser et al., V-I, Graz - Kain 1964-1999, I, 526: «cum tanta ex vicinatis locorum quam habitantium divitias atque potestas, qua minores crudes remaneer divino precelli, ut potestis commodis et expendiis alios principibus adimplerent ».
30 Die Register Innocenzi II, III, 395; Gestis Innocentii, in PL, CCXIV. CXX.
to whom the land and its fullness belong, in no way is it absurd to draw an analogy with the earthly emperor [...] If his army lacks food, it may take it anywhere [...] For necessity, especially when one is occupied in necessary work, excuses much in many situations.”

There can be no doubt that the pope’s views on this matter were known in the army of the Fourth Crusade. The chronicler Gunther of Pairs recorded that Innocent III had permitted the crusaders to take ‘half a year’s supply of free food’ from the Byzantine coast. The message was clear. If the Byzantine emperor failed to provide what was needed, the crusaders would be within their rights to seize it.

This then is the background to the diversion of the Fourth Crusade to Constantinople. An atmosphere had developed where crusade leaders considered themselves entirely justified in bringing force to bear on the Byzantine empire in order to extort the necessary supplies and money for the effort to retake Jerusalem. It was therefore particularly convenient that Alexios Angelos should appear in Italy during 1201 and make contact with Boniface of Montferrat and the other leaders of the Fourth Crusade. When his servants were sent to Venice to sound the leaders out, the message was returned: ‘If your young lord will agree to help us reconquer Jerusalem, we in our turn will help him regain his empire.’ By Christmas, Alexios was at the court of Philip of Swabia, brother of the late Emperor Henry VI, where he was joined by Boniface of Montferrat. It was no doubt at this time that Alexios made certain far-reaching promises: that he would hand over two hundred thousand silver marks and provide ample supplies for every man in the army. He also undertook to go with the crusader host to Egypt, at the head of a contingent of ten thousand men. Once that campaign was over, he would maintain a corps of five hundred knights in the Holy Land to assist in its defence. In the summer of 1203, following the restoration of Isaac II to the throne and the coronation of his son Alexios as co-emperor, another of the crusade leaders, Hugh of St Pol, wrote to one of his vassals in the west, proclaiming that the following March, the new emperor Alexios IV would be set out with the crusaders for the Holy Land, accompanied as promised by ten thousand soldiers, and that he had given his word to provide food for the crusade army for an entire year. This is just another example of Byzantine wealth being pressed out to finance a crusade, the only difference being that it was to be handed over as payment for services rendered, rather than seized by conquest or extracted by threats.

Unfortunately, receiving financial aid from Byzantium did not prove as easy as Hugh of St Pol had hoped. Alexios IV found it difficult to raise the immense sums that he had promised and his failure to pay put his relationship with the crusade leaders under great strain. By the winter of 1203-4 supplies were beginning to run short in the crusader camp and the leadership had once more to confront the familiar problem of feeding such a large army. By February 1204, however, it was clear that the crusaders were not going to be paid in full, now that their puppet Alexios IV was dead and Alexios V Mourtzouphlos had taken his place on the Byzantine throne.

There can be no doubt that the moral outrage felt in the crusader camp for what was seen as the treacherous murder of a liege lord by his vassal was genuine. Villehardouin goes so far as to present that outrage as the main motive and justification for the attack on Constantinople. To accept this explanation at face value, however, would be to ignore the other sources which betray the crusaders’ real concerns. Gunther of Pairs lamented that, had Alexios IV lived, he would have sent the crusaders well provisioned from his kingdom but now they had been cheated of all these things by the usurper. Baldwin of Flanders, the future Latin emperor of Constantinople, made much the same point, complaining that Mourtzouphlos had rejected the undertaking of his predecessor to provide aid for the Holy Land. The view from the ranks of the crusade comes from the chronicler known as the Anony-

[Notes and references omitted for brevity]
The capture of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204 was a catastrophe of immense magnitude. It marks a decisive turning point in the medieval history of Europe and the Mediterranean world, especially in the East. The capture has been lamented by historians who experienced the sack personally and narrated it as eyewitnesses, such as Nikeas Choniates, as well as by erudite historians, thinkers and writers of later times. Even in our days Umberto Eco has devoted some pages full of sensitive reflection to the event in his bestseller novel “Baudolino”. For a final judgement of what happened apparently there can be no way to excuse the behaviour of the Christian forces from the West involved in attacking and especially in looting the city and in conquering the European parts of the Byzantine Empire. Inevitable is therefore the conclusion that any form of modern reflection in the spirit of Christian fraternity cannot be effective unless it acknowledges the crime as a crime against humanity, in Donald Nicol’s phrasing “one of the greatest crimes in the annals of human affairs”.

However, the historian who wants to understand and explain what happened is asked to seek for causes in all possible areas, to draw attention to the shortcomings of all the parties involved and to bring to the fore what the different sides failed to do in order to hinder or foil the catastrophe to come. On this path of investigation this paper aims at signaling the shortcomings and mistakes of the victims, the Byzantines, both in the period leading to the capture of Constantinople and beyond.