

## THE FOURTH CRUSADE IN THE HISTORICAL REMINISCENCES OF THE EASTERN ORTHODOX SLAVS

### R é s u m é

The Fourth Crusade brought together important elements of the history of many European nations, eastern as well as western. This included not only Byzantium and its splinter “Roman” states of Nicaea, the Epirus, and the Latin Empire of Constantinople, but also the Balkan Slavic states of Serbia and the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. It even included distant Russia.

The issues of how the Orthodox Slavs interpreted the momentous event of the period – the fall of Constantinople – and what its Balkan aftermath was, are a tempting research area. This is so not only because issues of historical memory and the interpretation of historical events are especially topical today, but also because research would shed light on the interpretation of the Fourth Crusade from a yet-unexplored standpoint.

Of late, research into the Crusades has been particularly intensive, with the 800th anniversary of the fall of Constantinople to the crusaders adding its impetus to the generations-long historical interest in the period<sup>1</sup>. Relations between the Byzantine Empire and *les autres* have also attracted research interest in recent years: Byzantium and the East, Byzantium and the Arabs, even Byzantium and the North<sup>2</sup>. Yet, the standpoints of Orthodox Slavs as to the events around 1204 AD and the subsequent changes in the *status quo* has not been the subject of particular analysis.

This book traces the emergence of historical memory of the Fourth Crusade in the Orthodox Slavs’ literary tradition. Its basic sources are literary works dating back to the broad range of periods between the 13th and 17th Centuries, or the later Middle Ages in their extended entirety.

Naturally, the history of the Fourth Crusade has been told many times over by dedicated historians from Western Europe and Byzantium. Its general import, and particularly that of the fall of the Byzantine metropolis, were sensed by its contemporaries. Modern research primarily addresses political history, the conflicts between states and the division of territory, and the ideological changes resulting from the takeover of Constantinople by “the Latins”; yet it presents a seemingly unclear or muddled idea of how the Crusaders were regarded among the Balkan Slavs.

Documents from the period mention a great many names of rulers and statesmen. They are an arena on which the diplomacy of many 13th Century’s *eminenti* (rulers as well as senior clerics of the Bulgarian and Serbian Orthodox Churches) is acted out. The events of 1204 saw intensive efforts by senior Balkan clerics and statesmen such as Archbishop (Primas) Basilios and the Bulgarian Patriarch Yoakim<sup>2</sup>, the Serbian Archbishop Sava, Tsar Kaloyan and Kralj Stefan Prvovenčani. Through correspondence with Rome, they had direct access to information of the first order.

Foremost among the Crusader invaders cited in Slav sources are Baldwin of Flanders (first Emperor of the Latin Empire), his brother Henry, and the Marquess Boniface of Montferrat, king of Thessalonica. The Catholic clergy was also particularly active under Pope Innocent<sup>222</sup> and his legates. One way or another, they all found their way into Serbian, Bulgarian, and Russian annals.

The issue of how this knowledge was passed to posterity is another matter. The laws of historical memory do not always follow the expectations which distant heirs of an epoch may have. Thus, we may expect that since there was more than incidental contact between Balkan political elites, the Papacy, and the Crusaders, there ought to be historical records of events. Yet, it turns out that there is but a single broad historical record of the events of 1203-1204, in which an unknown Russian monk on a pilgrimage sets down his memories. This account forms the major historical source for this study. Chapter One is devoted to an analysis of it.

Other types of source are also used: ones which reflect the *zeitgeist*, such as Russian pilgrim monks’ descriptions of Constantinople. Such is the description of the city in 1200 by Dobrinya Yadreykovich, later Archbishop Anthony of Novgorod. It is of interest to us as evidence of the particular regard of an Orthodox man to holy sites in the Byzantine capital. When such a description by an Orthodox man full of frank

religious fascination with the many relics of saints kept in Constantinople's churches and monasteries, is placed side-by-side with similar texts by West European pilgrims, essential differences emerge in the attitudes of Westerners and those from the East towards Byzantine holies.

That the Crusaders were as motivated by the riches of the Eastern Empire, and that they pillaged not only secular but also religious items, is known from Western sources. As distinct from them, Orthodox pilgrims bowed before the holies of Byzantium, and the Hagia Sophia in particular. Russian texts also demonstrate a stable tradition of decrying and pitying the loss of some of Orthodoxy's greatest holies during the sacking of Constantinople by the Crusaders, the pillage of the Hagia Sophia, and the theft of many saintly mementoes and relics.

The fall of Constantinople to the Latins in 1204 was seen by its contemporaries as an exceptional event. This is seen in the many historical records left by Byzantine and Western authors. Yet, Orthodox Slavs were left to one side in this process of active recording of historical information. While the Orthodox community typically followed Byzantine models in literature and annals, adding or changing as required by each nation's own experience, Russian literature showed that original works such as the *Īāāñōū ī âçyòèè Öàðèäðäàà ìò ôðÿä* (*The Account of the Fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders*) could also appear. The main point is that the *Account* was kept in Russian manuscript vaults, being transcribed over and over, and thus continuing to act as a source from within Russian letters.

The contribution of this study is that it proves the reappearance of the *Account* in the Slavic South as part of a 16th Century historical collection. It makes clear that the memory of Constantinople's sacking by the Crusaders was passed by works such as the *Ñêàçàíèä ī ïñòðíáíèè òðàìà Ñíóèè Öàðäãðäãñèé* (*The Account of the Sancta Sophia of Constantinople*), devoted to the history of the Byzantine capital's foremost Orthodox church. In these works, which form an integral part of Slav religious literature, the fates of Constantinople and the Hagia Sophia play important roles. It follows, therefore, that the memory of the Byzantine capital's first fall, to the Crusaders, is preserved in them.

Apart from this Russian source contemporary to the fall of Constantinople in 1204, the process of disseminating historical information on these events represented a scattered and piecemeal effort involving individual and brief details spread across a variety of Mediaeval literary genres. Chapter Two: *Between Religion and History* analyses the two main circles of works which retain the memory of Constantinople's fall to the Latins. First, this involves the Lives of saints revered in the Second Bulgarian Empire and in 13th Century and later Serbia. After the hagiographies come apocalypses. Their distribution during the 13th Century was also particularly intensive and was reflected in the three Slav literatures under review.

Observing how information on the Fourth Crusade was imparted shows that this information took the route of hagiography. The reason why the Lives of saints were so extensively infused with historical data lies in the fact that the period of the Fourth Crusade coincided with the emergence and buttressing of the two Balkan Slav states. Serbians and Bulgarians followed the Byzantine model in recording the Lives of saints whose relics were transported for safekeeping to Turnovo and to diverse Serbian monasteries. Especially in Bulgaria, the translation of relics was largely linked with the Latin Empire in Constantinople. During the many armed clashes between Bulgarian rulers and the knights, Orthodox relics were translated from Thracian cities to Turnovo.

This redistribution of Byzantine holy relics during the Fourth Crusade involved the Balkan Slavs. It is worth noting that, as early as the 13th Century, "historical" detail was considered *de rigueur* in hagiographies. This was usually present in passages describing the translating of the relics to Turnovo. It was obligatory to highlight the name of the potentate who had decreed the transportation, while information on the Latins and their Empire was marginal. At its most generalised, the latter comprises the oft-encountered phrase, "when the Franks were at Constantinople."

The Lives present the images of genuine historical figures of the period. As concerns Bulgaria, they were the Tsars Kaloyan and Ivan Asen II. Their presence reinforces the idea of an independent Bulgarian state and church. This leaves little ground for reporting the existence in Constantinople of an authority different to the Byzantine one. Inasmuch as snippets of information or detail on the triumphs of Kaloyan over the Latins or of the times of Ivan Asen II do appear, they tell us little that is specific about the fall of Constantinople to the Crusaders in 1204.

Bulgarian hagiography entered a distinct new phase of development with editions published under the Patriarch Euthymios in the late 14th Century. It is conceivable that the greater detail we find in the Euthymios Lives was unknown to the anonymous scribes of early hagiographies from the 13th Century. It is also of note that the earliest Euthymios Lives date back to the late 14th Century, though they were subsequently copied for centuries to come.

The position with Serbian rulers' Lives is more interesting. Not only are they devoted to figures who took genuine part in the events of the early 13th Century, but their very authors were often participants in these events. Such were Stefan Nemanja and Sava. This is particularly obvious in *The Life of Stefan Nemanja* written by Stefan Prvovenčani. In this, the ruler describes his own life and times. (His is the sole description of Emperor Henry of Flanders in a Slav source; he is described as an enemy of the Serbian state due to having attacked it in 1214, and as brazen and impure.) Archbishop Sava of Serbia also authored a *Life of Stefan Nemanja*, his father and founder of the Serbian state. The two Lives of Stefan Nemanja by his two sons contain no references to the capture of Constantinople by the Knights of the Fourth Crusade, except most veiled ones. This prompts the question of why Serbian 13th Century Lives appear to conceal the event. The answer is hidden in the simple and pragmatic reason that there was no need to convey historical information about the event. The direction which Serbian policy followed was to refuse to recognise the legitimacy of the Latin Emperors in Constantinople. To Serbian authors, they continued to be "Greek Kings." A problem arose when the Emperor of Nicaea also had to be named; he then became "the King of Constantinople," while by the same token the Despot of the Epirus became "Michael the Greek." The matter of the Latin Empire in Constantinople was also glossed-over in the same manner. The trend led to this period being forgotten soon after the restoration of Byzantium under Manuel Palaiologos.

A hagiographic peculiarity concerning St Sava specifically is that it undergoes several revisions, marked by the work of two Serbian men of letters, Domentian and Theodosius, in the middle and late 13th Century. The idea of the Latin Empire undergoes a change in the two hagiographies of St Sava. Thus, the Latin Emperor is omitted from the sequence of miracles ascribed to the saint, perhaps due to incompatibilities with the Serbian idea of Mediaeval Byzantine statehood (the more so since the Latin Empire was no longer extant in the late 13th Century). Thus, Serbian lives maintain silence on the fall of Constantinople and the Latin presence there. As regards surviving transcriptions of Southern Slav hagiographies, it repays mention that most Lives survive in later transcriptions dating as far as the 17th Century. On the other hand, this merely confirms the constant interest in this literary genre, and that the lives were a source of historical knowledge to their readers and listeners.

Prophecies – works of so-called "vernacular literature" – also formed an essential part of devotional writing. Their link with history is particularly obtuse. All that remains of historical events is reminiscence, symbolic mention, or images thickly overlaid with Biblical and other layers. Prophecies do, however, date back to the 13th Century itself, as evidenced by those in the renowned Miscellany of priest Dragol. Moreover, the advent of the Latins to Constantinople is considered to have delivered a great boost to this literary form. Once again, existing transcriptions date back to later periods such as the 16th and 17th Centuries.

The lack of direct historical sources from the period puts the problem of history in Slav letters to the forefront (Chapter Three: The Slav Historical Tradition). It was D. Obolensky who pointed out that Byzantine world chronicles found the best reception among the Slavs<sup>3</sup>. Over the entire Medieval period, Slav scribes translated the chronicles of John Malala, the Patriarch Nikephoros, Constantine Manasses and others. These works best dovetailed with Slav religious perceptions and with their view of history as a sequence of reigns. It was in such Russian and Balkan works that we find memories of the events of 1204. Specific works contain lists of Byzantine rulers. Most of them are historical works such as *Ėāōōēēāō āēōāōōā* [*The Abridged Anna*]. It, as others like it, invariably listed Byzantine Emperors, including those of the Latin Empire. The last mentioned ruler is usually Alexius V Murzuphlus, who is followed by the rulers of Nicaea. The fall of Constantinople is routinely overlooked, or else receives scant mention.

The *Synodikon* is particularly important among the chronicles. It is known to have been composed in Bulgaria in 1211, and later translated into Serbian and Russian. An intriguing point followed in the study concerns the *Synodikon's* listing of both Byzantine and Bulgarian rulers. The work is also important for the substantive reason that it contains the impressions its unknown Bulgarian author had of the circumstances of

13th Century Byzantium. That state was represented as being divided into two parts: eastern and western. Thus, the times of the Latin Empire were subjected to oblivion.

It turned out that direct borrowings and transcriptions of parts of lives were present in many samples of historical literature, more specifically the lives of St Sava and Ste Petka. This particularly concerns chronicles: historical compilations emerging in Russia and thereafter distributed in Serbia, yet in an epoch far removed from the 13th Century. The earliest date back to the 16th Century. At the close of the chronicle tradition is a renowned Moldovan chronicle authored by monk Michael Moxa in 1620, which renders the information available at the time on the events of 1204 in the form of a list of reigning Byzantine Emperors of the period. This is the sole preserved source resting upon an undoubted old Bulgarian basis and hence linked with erstwhile written monuments, which passes on information on the Crusaders in an “historical” manner.

The question of why Bulgaria failed to retain any historical work describing the Fourth Crusade, the fall of Constantinople, and Kaloyan’s victory at Hadrianople, is most intractable. A number of events of especial significance to the Bulgarian Middle Ages did coincide with the Latin Empire. Apart from the aforementioned 1205 Battle of Hadrianople, they included the Council of 1211, the restoration of the Bulgarian autocephalous church under Ivan Assen II and the death of St Sava in Turnovo in 1235. None was memorised in a broad work; if mentioned briefly somewhere, often only once for each event, such reference appears almost incidental.

The fact that those bearing the title Emperor of Byzantium spent decades (at least the 57 years between 1204 and 1261) in Nicaea in Asia Minor, rather than at Constantinople, appears to be purposefully omitted. This circumstance is mentioned neither in Bulgarian, nor in Serbian sources. Balkan Slavs in the 13th Century regarded only the title of Emperor of Constantinople as valid, bestowing it to the *de facto* ruler of Byzantium, albeit in Nicaea. Correspondingly, texts betray a certain disdain of the Latins in Constantinople. Baldwin is thus named “that man,” while other Latin Emperors (Henry, Baldwin II, Robert of Courtenay) remain nameless in the annals. This is despite the complex and numerous dynastic connections between them and the rulers of Bulgaria and those of other Balkan territories of the period.

The Serbian tradition in annals is better delineated. It features a plentiful stream of works whose number grows, reaching a peak at the close of the Middle Ages with the appearance of chroniclers in 17th Century Serbia. Thanks to the many Serbian texts, we are able to reconstitute the pattern of Balkan historical information on the Fourth Crusade.

The process convinces us that the tradition of transcribing the same data over centuries was most enduring. The *Account* of the fall of Constantinople in 1204 appears unedited in many annals and chronicles. There is a Serbian addendum to Slavic translations of the 9th Century Byzantine Patriarch Nikephoros, comprising 14th and 15th Century lists of Byzantine rulers and the durations of their reigns. Entitled *Öàðeä öäðñöäóðüä â Êíññöäíöëä äðäää* (*Emperors Reigning in the City of Constantine*), the addendum was also known in Russia where it was used in compiling historical works. This list of Byzantine rulers also lay at the base of an early 13th Century record which is imprecise, with the order of rulers transposed and the years of many reigns confused. The addendum makes it clear that the Balkan Slavs and the Russians had unclear knowledge of what precisely took place in Constantinople in the years after 1204. It is true that, as confirmed by other sources, Emperors changed places rather often, and that several of them bore the name Alexios. Yet, this caveat is absent from Slav records. An impression emerges of certain bias in the recording of certain Emperors at the expense of others. The names of the Emperor of Nicaea Theodore Lascaris and of the Despot of the Epirus Theodore Komnenos are persistently confused, obviously due to the former’s close links with St Sava and to his role in founding the autocephalous Serbian church. Annals retained only phrases to the effect that “the Greek Kingdom was divided into two and the Latins ruled Constantinople”: a verbatim repetition of what we know from hagiographies.

Viewed in historical perspective, the Latin Period in Constantinople was left in the shade of the next major Balkan cataclysm: the coming of the Ottoman Turks and the ultimate fall of Byzantium under their rule in 1453. This is also seen in the superimposition of the Turkish conquest over older examples of Byzantine prophetic literature and in vernacular writings such as apocalypsa. The Latin Empire period was reflected and perceived as a brief episode which left scant trace in the Slavic psyche. In the overwhelming volume of literature, diverse mixed compilations, transcripts and new editions of old works, the early 13th Century

wanes in the shade of 1453. Even the phrase “the fall of Constantinople” is naturally ascribed to the ultimate conquest by the Turks in 1453.

We may also look upon things from another angle. Most transcriptions of the Russian *Account of the Taking of Constantinople by the Franks* and the *Account of Sancta Sophia of Constantinople* date back to the 16th Century. They are the basic historical text which proves Slav interest in the events in Constantinople in 1204. As shown, the major part of written sources dates back to the same 16th Century. It is a fact that it was this century that showed a marked difference from former ones as regards interest in history. We have considerably fewer 13th, 14th and 15th Centuries’ sources with specific historical information on the 1204 events. Russian chroniclers emerged in the 16th Century along with numerous transcripts of various devotional and historical works which found distribution among the Orthodox Slavs and in their cultural centres.

Russian annals began to develop actively in the 16th Century. A number of factors contributed to this, among them active reworking and transcribing of Byzantine chronicles and the rise of the idea of Moscow as the Third Rome, *i. e.*, of the passing of the Byzantine heritage (cultural included) to Russia. The ultimate fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks and the end of Byzantium in 1453 also left its mark on historical writing in Russia. Manifold historical manuscripts set off in their turn from there to the Balkans. Information on the Fourth Crusade thus returned to the Balkans to be remembered by posterity. It was thanks to Russian men of letters that the people of the Balkans learned about Byzantine, Serbian and Bulgarian history as recorded in books named the *Trojadik* and *Carostavnik*.

The handing down of historical memory about the times of the Fourth Crusade among the Orthodox Slavs is seen as a process occupying the entire Middle Ages. This process has its stages and its specifics in each of the Slav nations. Its basic characteristic is that the tradition of writing about the past was alive mainly in clerical and monastic circles and in works read and transcribed mainly among monks.

Appendices to the study comprise translations into Bulgarian of some of the most important texts: *The Account of the Fall of Constantinople* the description of Constantinople by Antony of Novgorod, excerpts from a Russian annal, an excerpt from the *Letopis of Branković*, and others.

<sup>1</sup> In this connection, see the latest research and compilations of papers on the Fourth Crusade: Harris, J., *Byzantium and the Crusades*, London-New York, 2003; *Urbs capta: La IV<sup>e</sup> croisade et ses conséquences* (ed. A. Laiou), Paris-London, 2005. General Crusade historiography is available at [www.the-orb.net/bibliographies/crusades.html](http://www.the-orb.net/bibliographies/crusades.html).

<sup>2</sup> Маагуф, А. Кръстоносните походи през погледа на арабите, С., 2001; *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World* (ed. A. Laiou, R. P. Mottahedeh), Washington D.C., 2001; “Eastern Approaches to Byzantium” (ed. A. Eastmond), *Papers from the Thirty-Third Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, University of Warwick, Coventry, 1999; “Medieval History Writing and Crusading Ideology” (ed. T. Lehtonen, K. V. Jensen), *Studia Fennica*, 9, Tampere, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Оболенски, Д. Византийската общност. Източна Европа 500-1453. С., 2001, 437.