



The Fourth Crusade

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The Fourth Crusade

Adapted from material prepared by Arthur Winfield Hodgman

THE *Historia Constantinopolitana* of Gunther of Pairis, one of the few sources of our information about the little-known Fourth Crusade (1202–1204), is of great interest to the Latinist as well as to the historian. Magister Guntherus Parisiensis, as he styles himself, was a Cistercian living in retirement at Pairis in Alsace when he wrote his “*Historia Constantinopolitana, seu de expugnatione urbis Constantinopolitane, unde, inter alias reliquias, magna pars sancte crucis in Alemanniam est allata.*” (The reader will observe that the diphthongs æ and œ are represented by long ē.) Paul Eduard Didier Riant, who published an edition of the work in 1876, believes that Gunther composed the book from reminiscences of the Abbé Martin of Pairis, although Gunther himself more modestly claims that “*idem vir . . . puram nobis ac simplicem enarravit historiam* (58).” It is divided into 25 chapters, each of which is followed by about 20 verses in hexameter or elegiac meter. The narrative centers about the Abbé Martin, while the chief leaders of the Crusade were Baldwin, Count of Flanders, and Boniface, Marquis of Montferrat.

The Crusade was proclaimed by Pope Innocent III in Germany on December 31, 1199, and it was preached in France, Flanders, Normandy, and Brittany, while Martin of Pairis preached it in upper Germany.

The “*exercitus signatorum*” left Basel in the late spring of 1202 and “*stratam illam arripuit que per angustos Tridentine vallis anfractus Veronam ducit.*” From Verona the host went to Venice; “*ibi naves intrare decreverant,*” probably because Venice alone could furnish an adequate number of ships. Gunther does not explicitly state that the pilgrims could not produce all the money

needful for their passage, but such seems to have been the fact. The Venetians refused to take them on board unless they would go with them to Iazira (Zara), a Dalmatian city hostile to Venice, and help the Venetians to capture it. Martin begged the pope’s representative, Peter of Capua, that he be allowed to return to his cloister; instead Peter put Martin in charge of all the Theothonici, the Teutonic part of the host.

Excommunication

THE COMBINED FORCES captured Zara in three days, “*sine cede et sanguine* (74).” Zara was a Christian city, belonging to Emeri, king of Hungary, himself a croisé though he did not take the field. So by this attack “*nostri sententiam excommunicationis inciderant* (74).” Martin and two others were chosen to go to Rome and explain to the pope that they had made the attack under compulsion, and to beg that “*illam excommunicationis relaxaret sententiam* (75).” To this the pope agreed.

Before the pilgrims left Zara, the chiefs received proposals from the young Alexius, Greek pretender to the throne of Constantinople, promising that if the host would help him to capture the city he would (1) pay the balance that the crusaders owed the Venetians; (2) furnish money and provisions to enable them to conquer Egypt; (3) send an army of 10,000 men to Egypt; (4) support 500 cavalymen as a guard for the Holy Land; (5) submit the Greek empire to the pope and thus reestablish the unity of Eastern and Western churches. All this seemed wonderful to the crusaders. Constantinople was much nearer than Rome to the Holy Land, and might better serve as a base of operations—“*quanto vicinius, tanto prestantius*

ministrabit auxilium (86)." The promise of unification of the churches was of course intended to win the approval of the pope and lessen his displeasure at the attacks on Zara and Constantinople.

The host moved on to Corfu in the spring of 1203 and there signed the agreement which committed them to support Alexius. Accordingly they proceeded to the attack on Constantinople, where Martin joined them again the following winter.

Meanwhile, when Martin left the pope, the latter "*vehementer expavit, metuens ne maligni hostis invidia, hac occasione, vel totius nostri exercitus machinaretur interitum, vel saltem crucis negotium impediret* (77)." Innocent's three world problems were Constantinople, the Holy Land, and Germany. Now young Alexius was brother-in-law of Philip of Suabia, King of Germany (1177-1208), whose rival Otto had been chosen Holy Roman Emperor in 1198, but was not crowned until 1209. Well might the pope be worried at the intrusion of Alexius into the affairs of the host. The pope hated Constantinople: "*oderat autem summus pontifex illam urbem* (78)"; still he fervently desired much that the crusaders sail for Alexandria.

Voyage to Constantinople

MARTIN MET Peter of Capua at Beneventum and through him said good-by to all his Teutons on April 4, 1203. He took boat at Sypus (Sipontum), and reached Achon (Acre) on April 25. A pestilence broke out in Syria "*circa dies illos, qui propter fervoris malitiam caniculares vocari solent* (80)." Word was sent from Acre to the pilgrims, "*quos in Grecia versari acceperant*," that the crusaders should send help to Acre and the Holy Land. On this embassy Martin was sent on November 8, 1203, along with one Conrad of Swartzenberk (82), and the two reached Constantinople on January 1, 1204, "*ubi tunc exercitus noster non satis letus agebat, eo quod magnum discrimen incurrisset, negotiis implicitus alienis* (83)," that is, the restoration of Alexius.

Here Gunther digresses to relate a dream of Constantine, as a result of which he had enlarged and transformed the old Byzantium

into the wonderful city of Constantinople. He describes at some length the second attack and capture of the city, with a detailed account of the erecting on the ships of a large number of extra masts which were made to serve as ladders—"turre ille, sive scalas vocare malueris (99)"—whence the attackers could look down on the walls and even jump down upon them. Two thousand of the inhabitants were killed during the capture, and only one from the host, a rider who was thrown from a horse that stumbled.

The conquerors were amazed at the richness of the city, and in due time they were permitted to loot it. "*Cepit [i.e. coepit] Martinus abbas de sua etiam preda cogitare . . . et proposuit et ipse sacratas manus suas ad rapinam extendere. Sed quoniam predam rerum secularium eisdem manibus attricare putabat indignum, illud agere cepit ut de reliquiis sanctorum, quarum ibi magnam sciebat esse copiam, aliquam sibi corraderet fortunam* (104)." So he went, with one chaplain as a companion, to the church of Pantocrator, "*locum petit secretiorum*," found an old man on duty. "*Placido quidem animo sed voce quidem terribili, vehementer increpans, 'Age,' inquit, 'perfide senex, ostende mihi quas potiores servas reliquias* (105).'" The old man opened for him "*ferratam arcam, ostendens ei thesaurum desiderabilem. Martinus festinanter et cupide utrasque manus immersit . . . sacro sacrilegio sinus suos implens, tam ipse quam capellanus*," and departed, "*suffarcinatus, ut ita loquar* (106)." The friends he met asked "*an ipse aliqua rapuisset*"; cannily he replied, "*Bene nobis actum est*," to which they answered "*Deo gratias*." No one knew of his prize except the chaplain and the old man who had guarded the treasure. He stuck close to him and found him a suitable place in which to lodge.

Baldwin of Flanders, having been chosen Latin king of Constantinople, offered to make Martin a bishop, but Martin refused the appointment. His great concern was to get back home with his booty, and he left Constantinople on September 8, 1204. In Acre he confided in an Alsatian named Wernher, who urged him to leave the sacred relics at Mt. Carmel. However "*Wernherus secretum*

tenuit (115)." Evading various threatening dangers along the way, through Venice, the Alps, to Basel, Martin arrived on June 24, 1205, "ad Parisiense monasterium. Reliquias in ipsam ecclesiam, et in ipso altari maiore, qua potuit reverentia collocavit (119)."

Holy Relics

AT THIS POINT Gunther gives the list of relics (121):

Primum, Vestigium Sanguinis Domini nostri Iesu Christi.

Secundum vero, Lignum est Dominice Crucis.

Tertium est non modica portio S. Ioannis precursoris Domini.

Quantum vero brachium S. Iacobi apostoli.

Sunt etiam aliorum sanctorum reliquie, quorum nomina subsequuntur: [48 items in all, including such entries as]

pes S. Cosme martyr

de capite Cypriani martyr

dens S. Laurentii

de loco Nativitatis Domini

de lapide revoluta

de loco dominice Ascensionis

de loco ubi Christus Lazarum suscitavit

de lapide ubi Christus ieiunavit

de tabula super qua Christus cenavit

de lacte matris Domini, Agate virginis, Agnetis virginis

From these gifts of celestial grace, the church at Pairis gave to Philip of Suabia, "serenissimo imperatori, laudabilem valde portionem, tabulam scilicet quemdam inestimabilis fere pretii," which the Greek emperor used to wear, on holy days, hanging from his neck by a golden chain (125). It is safe to say that this really was a bribe to the emperor, who otherwise would have claimed all as his own.

Thus ends the *Historia*. "Scripsit autem hanc historiam Magister Guntherus quidam, tunc Monachus, prius autem Scholasticus, vir admodum eruditus." Twenty-two hexameters follow, closing with a prayer for Martin,

Quem sibi dilectum, Christo quoque iudice,
rectum

Approbet examen; dicat qui legerit: Amen

and for Gunther himself,

Vitam percipiat, dic, lector, dic, ita fiat!

The Latin of the *Historia* is relatively easy and exceedingly interesting for its variety and departures from classical usage. Variations in spelling, aside from substitution of *ē* for *æ* and *œ*, include: *y* for *i* (*Ytalia*, *Ydoneus*, *ymagine*) and the reverse (*misterio*, *Egiptie*); *h* intruded (*archanam*, *hiis*, *michi*) or omitted (*tesauri*); *ci* for *ti* (*reverenciam*, *Veneciam*, *Egipciam*); *f* for *ph* (*frigio*, *fantasmata*) and the reverse (*prophane*). New meanings of words include: *peregrini*, 'pilgrims'; *sententia*, 'sentence (of excommunication)'; *articulus*, 'article of faith'; *strata*, 'street'; *desidero* for *volo*; *feria tertia*, 'Tuesday'; *feria sexta*, 'Friday.' There are peculiarities of syntax: *pro eo quod*, 'because'; *ceteri omnes* (needless repetition); *quod* or *quia* with indicative, instead of accusative with infinitive (*scio quia manus Domini tecum est*); double negative (*nec ventus, nec pluvia . . . nocere nullatenus prevaleret*); *mansit paucis diebus* (instead of accusative of duration); *in manu impiorum data est* (ablative for accusative); *dixitque ad eum* (instead of dative). The word order is generally excellent and effective, in keeping with the character of the Latin language. Such word groups as these are common: *plurimum habent admirationis*; *illorum scilicet hominum*; *largas distribuit portiones*; *illorum infinitus erat numerus*; *magna utriusque ordinis, novis excitata rumoribus, convenerat multitudo*.

Rhymed Hexameters

The interesting feature of the groups of verses that follow each of the 25 books is the way Gunther has introduced rhyme into the traditional hexameters and elegiacs. There is a great variety of rhyme patterns, a metrical tour de force which reminds one of the sequence of meters at the beginnings of the first three books of Horace's *Odes*.

In some cases the ends of metrical cola present what may be called "eye rhyme," as there is correspondence in spelling though not in accent.

Queque semel fieri placuit, nova semper haberi
Ne qua premat nubēs, splendide facta iubēs
(1.59).

In certain other verses, corresponding cola of odd and even lines are paired.

Mox ubi *conticuît*, presso vir providus *ôre*
Undique turba *ruît*, leto compuncta *dolôre*
(III.65).

Other schemes follow in increasing complexity.

Quo *gemitû*, sibi iam *reditû*, Martinus *adêmpto*
Substiterît, quis *crediderît*, si dicere *têmpto*
(VI.73).

Nomine dignus erât, quem gratia tanta *replêrat*
Quod sibi fors *dederât*, *nomine dignus erât*
(VII.75).

One group of ten hexameters shows in the odd verses the type known as Hora novissima, although the even verses differ slightly.

Presul *amâbilis*, et *venerâbilis*, ac *generôsus*
Papa *parêns*, homo labe *carêns*, malaque *perôsus*.

Miscellaneous Excerpts

THE FOLLOWING PASSAGES from the *Historia* are presented as being interesting per se and requiring little if any comment.

Uterque locus . . . tam cenobium quam et famosa civitas illa Francorum, Parisius nominatur; quod nomen lingua quidem Gallica suam habet etymologiam; Theothonice vero ex hoc videtur habere rationem et causam, quod primi cenobite, qui de monasterio Luculensi ad inhabitandum illum locum missi sunt, nil aliud ibi, nisi locum desertum et frigidum, et *puram glaciem* repperunt (60).

This etymology for Pairis from *pura glacies* would be justified (lxxv) by the Middle High German *bâr is*.

[[The pope hated Constantinople,]] tam ipse quam eius predecessores, a multo tempore, quoniam iam diu Romae ecclesie rebellis exstiterat, et in quibusdam fidei articulis, velut in processione Spiritus sancti, quem Greci de Filio procedere negant, et in modo sacrificandi, quod illi in fermentato [sc. pane] facere solent, a fide catholica dissidebant; unde et quendam cardinalem, qui, quodam tempore, a summo pontifice ad eos corrigendos et instruendos missus erat, versis sursum vestigiis et capite deorsum in aere suspenderunt, donec

communicato cum Petro spiritum exhalaret (78).

Aware that the host ought not to have attacked Zara, Gunther explains:

Lectorem volumus esse admonitum ut, si qua etiam a populo nostro contra pietatem facta videbuntur, ea tamen voluntate divina, semper utique iusta, facta esse non dubitet.

After the capture of Constantinople, thinking that the Marquis of Montferrat would become their king,

mulieres vero et parvuli, ac decrepiti senes, qui fugere non valentes in urbe remanserunt, in occurso nostrorum digitum digito in formam crucis implicantes, satis flebiliter "Aios phasileos marchi" decantabant, quod Latine "sanctus rex marchio" interpretatur (103).

The Latinized Greek represents the Byzantine pronunciation of *ἅγιος βασιλεὺς*.

Of the coins known as *bézants* or *bezants*, Olim quidem . . . Greco nomine *Bisancion* vocabatur; unde et apud modernos nummi aurei, qui in illa urbe formari consueverunt, a nomine ipsius urbis *bisantiij* appellantur (95).

And to explain the name of Rumania,

unde et ipsa urbs quandoque altera Roma dicta est, et terra ei adiacens hodieque Romania vocatur (97).

Gunther is the only chronicler who tells us of the two ways in which the crusaders wore the cross.

Pectora felici decorantur tergaque signo
Sorte quidem duplici, sed utralibet ordine digno.

Non sine misterio fuit hoc quocunque reperiunt

Certa fuit ratio quod iam faciemus apertum.
Qui gerit ante crucem, reditum se nolle fatetur,
Qui retro, se reducem fieri sperare videtur.
Hec vetus est ratio, paucis hoc tempore nota,
Temporis et spatio multis a corde remota.
Hac ratione quidem, titulo crucis ista notante
Moris erat pridem signari retro vel ante.