

GEOFFREY OF
VILLEHARDOUIN
The Conquest of
Constantinople

CHAPTER I

Preparations for the Fourth Crusade

(1197-1202)

[1] Know that 1197 years after the incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the reign of the Roman Pope Innocent, of King Philip of France and of King Richard of England, there was a holy man in France whose name was Fulk of Neuilly.¹ This Neuilly is located between Lagny-sur-Marne and Paris, and he was the parish priest of the town. And this Fulk of whom I speak began to preach God's word in France² and in other neighbouring lands, and Our Lord performed many miracles for him. [2] Know that this holy man's renown spread so far that it reached Pope Innocent, who sent word to France and instructed the *preudomme* to preach the cross with papal authority. Later he sent one of his cardinals who had taken the cross, Master Peter Capuano, and through him offered the indulgence I describe here: all those who would take the cross and serve God for a year in the army would be free from all the sins they had committed and confessed. People's hearts were greatly moved because the indulgence was so generous, and many of them took the cross because of this.

[3] In the year following the preaching of the word of God by this *preudomme*, Fulk, a tournament was held in Champagne, at the castle of Ecry. By God's grace it so happened that Thibaut, count of Champagne and Brie, took the cross along with Count Louis of Blois and Chartres.³ This took place at the start of Advent.⁴ Now, you should know that this Count Thibaut was a young man no more than twenty-two years old, and Count Louis no more than twenty-seven. These two counts were nephews and first cousins of the king of France and nephews of the king of England⁵ moreover. [4] As well as these

two counts, two of the greatest barons of France took the cross: Simon of Montfort⁶ and Renaud of Montmirail. Word spread far and wide through the land when these two eminent men took the cross.

[5] In Count Thibaut of Champagne's lands, Bishop Garnier of Troyes took the cross and so did Count Walter of Brienne, Geoffrey of Joinville (the seneschal of the county) and his brother Robert,⁷ Walter of Vignory, Walter of Montbéliard, Eustace of Comflans and his brother Guy of Plessis, Henry of Arzillières, Ogier of Saint-Chéron, Villain of Nully, Geoffrey of Villehardouin (the marshal of Champagne) and his nephew Geoffrey, William of Nully, Walter of Fuligny, Evrard of Montigny, Manassiers of l'Isle, Maccaire of Sainte-Menebould, Milon le Bréban, Guy of Chappes and his nephew Clarembaut, Renaud of Dampierre, John Foison, and many other worthy men not mentioned in this book.

[6] Gervase of Châteauneuf and his son Hervé took the cross with Count Louis, as did John of Vierzon, Oliver of Rochefort, Henry of Montreuil, Payen of Orléans, Peter of Bracieux and his brother Hugh, William of Sains, John of Friaize, Walter of Godonville, Hugh of Cormeray and his brother Geoffrey, Hervé of Beauvoir, Robert of Frouville and his brother Peter, Orry of l'Isle, Robert of le Quartier, and many others not mentioned in this book.

[7] In France, Bishop Nivelon of Soissons took the cross and so did Matthew of Montmorency and his nephew Guy the castellan of Coucy,⁸ Robert of Ronsoy, Frederick of Yerres and his brother John, Walter of Saint-Denis and his brother Henry, William of Aulnay, Robert Mauvoisin, Dreux of Cressonsacq, Bernard of Moreuil, Enguerrand of Boyes and his brother Robert, and many other *preudommes* whom this book will keep quiet about for now.

[8] At the beginning of the following Lent, on Ash Wednesday, Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut⁹ took the cross at Bruges along with his wife, Countess Marie, who was Count Thibaut of Champagne's sister. Afterwards the count's brother Henry took the cross and so did his nephew Thierry (the son of the late Count Philip of Flanders), William the advocate of

Béthune and his brother Conon, John of Nesle the castellan of Bruges, Renier of Trit and his son Renier, Matthew of Wallin-court, James of Avesnes, Baldwin of Beauvoir, Hugh of Beaumont, Gerard of Mauchicourt, Odo of Ham, William of Gommegnies, Dreux of Beaurain, Roger of Marcke, Eustace of Salperwick, François of Colemi, Walter of Bousies, Renier of Mons, Walter of Stombe, Bernard of Somergem, and many *preudommes* this book does not speak of.

[9] Afterwards Count Hugh of Saint-Pol took the cross. His nephew Peter of Amiens took the cross with him, and so did Eustace of Canteleux, Nicholas of Mailly, Anseau of Cayeux, Guy of Houdain, Walter of Nesle and his brother Peter, and many other people we are unsure of. [10] After this Count Geoffrey of Perche took the cross as did his brother Stephen, Rotrou of Montfort, Yves of la Jaille, Aimery of Villeray, Geoffrey of Beaumont, and many others whose names I do not know.

[11] Then the barons held a conference at Soissons to discuss when they should leave and in which direction they should go. At that time they could not come to any agreement since it seemed to them that not nearly enough people had taken the cross so far. Less than two months later in that same year all the counts and barons who had taken the cross gathered for a meeting at Compiègne. Many opinions were given and taken, as a result of which it was determined that they would send out the best envoys they could find and give them full authority, equivalent to that of their lords, to attend to all their affairs.

[12] Thibaut, the count of Champagne and Brie, sent two of these envoys, Baldwin, the count of Flanders and Hainaut, sent two, and Louis, the count of Blois, sent two. Count Thibaut's envoys were Geoffrey of Villehardouin, marshal of Champagne, and Milon le Bréban, Count Baldwin's envoys were Conon of Béthune¹⁰ and Alard Maquereau, and Count Louis's envoys were John of Friaize and Walter of Godonville. [13] The counts placed all their business in the hands of these six envoys. They provided them with the appropriate charters, to which their seals were attached, declaring that they would be strictly bound by whatever agreements the six men made in all the seaports and other towns they visited.

[14] The six envoys set out as you have heard. They conferred together and agreed that they could be confident of finding a greater supply of ships at Venice than at any other port. They rode on, day after day, until they arrived there in the first week of Lent.¹¹

[15] The doge of Venice was a most wise and most venerable man whose name was Enrico Dandolo.¹² He and the other people of Venice treated the envoys most honourably and they were very pleased to welcome them. When the envoys presented the letters from their lords, the Venetians were very curious about what business had brought them to their country. In these letters of credence the counts said that their envoys should be trusted as if they were the counts themselves, and that they would be bound by whatever agreements the six men made.

[16] The doge said to them, 'My lords, I have examined your letters. We acknowledge your lords to be the most exalted of men without crowns, and that they instruct us to have faith in what you say to us and to have absolute confidence in the arrangements you make. So, tell us what it is that you would like.'

[17] And the envoys replied, 'Sir, we would like it if you would summon your councillors – tomorrow, if it is convenient for you – and we will tell you what our lords ask of you in their presence.' The doge asked them for a delay of four days; his council would gather then and they could make their request.

[18] They waited until the appointed day and then they went inside the doge's palace, which was very grand and beautiful. They found the doge and his council in a chamber and delivered their message thus: 'Lord doge, we have come to you on behalf of the great barons of France who have been signed with the cross in order to avenge Jesus Christ's dishonour and to conquer Jerusalem, if God so permits. And because they know that no people have such great power as you and your people, they beg you, for the love of God, to have pity on the land overseas and for Jesus Christ's injury, and to consider how they might obtain ships and a fleet.'

[19] 'How would the barons wish to acquire them?' asked

the doge. 'In whatever way that you urge or advise them,' replied the envoys, 'assuming they have the means to do so.' 'This is certainly a substantial request they are making of us,' said the doge, 'and it seems they are planning an ambitious expedition. We will give you our response a week from today. And don't be surprised that this date is a long way off, since it is necessary to give a lot of thought to such a major undertaking.'

[20] At the end of the time set by the doge the envoys returned to the palace. I cannot tell you all the arguments that were put forward and debated there, but this was the doge's final word: 'My lords,' he said, 'we will tell you what we have decided, subject to the approval of our great council and the people of Venice, and you may consider whether you have the will and the means to go ahead.'

[21] 'We will build horse transports to carry 4,500 horses and 9,000 squires, with 4,500 knights and 20,000 foot sergeants travelling in ships. And we will agree to provide food for all these horses and people for nine months.¹³ This is the minimum we would provide in return for a payment of four marks per horse and two marks per man. [22] All the terms we are offering you would be valid for one year from the day of our departure from the port of Venice to do service to God and Christendom, wherever that might take us. The total cost of what has just been outlined would amount to 94,000 marks.¹⁴ [23] And what's more we will provide, for the love of God, fifty armed galleys, on condition that for as long as our association lasts we will have one half of everything we capture on land or at sea, and you will have the other. Now you should consider whether you have the will and the means to go ahead.'

[24] The envoys left, saying they would confer together and give their response the next day. They consulted and discussed together that night and agreed they should go ahead. The following day they came before the doge and said, 'Sir, we are ready to confirm this arrangement.' And the doge said he would discuss the matter with his people and would let the envoys know what transpired.

[25] The next day, the third after he made his proposal, the doge – who was a most wise and venerable man – summoned

his great council, which was made up of fifty of the wisest men of that land. Using his intelligence and powers of reason – which were both very sound and very sharp – he persuaded them to favour and accept the arrangements. More people were brought into the meeting, first one hundred, then 200 and then 1,000, so that all of them might give their backing and approval. Then at least 10,000 people were gathered together in the church of Saint Mark – the most beautiful church there is – and the doge told them to listen to a Mass of the Holy Spirit and to pray to God for his guidance concerning the request the envoys had made of them. And they did so most willingly. [26] When Mass had been said the doge called for the envoys and instructed them to ask all these people humbly whether it was their will that this agreement be made. The envoys came to the church, where they were observed with great interest by many people who had not seen them before.

[27] With the agreement and approval of the other envoys, Geoffrey of Villehardouin, marshal of Champagne, announced their intentions, and said, 'My lords, the most eminent and powerful barons of France have sent us to you, and they beg you to take pity on Jerusalem, which is enslaved by the Turks, and to be willing, for God's sake, to join them in avenging Jesus Christ's dishonour. They have chosen you for this task since they know that no other people have such a mighty power on the seas as do you and your people. And they have ordered us to prostrate ourselves at your feet and not to get up until you have agreed to take pity on the Holy Land overseas.'

[28] Immediately the six envoys knelt at the feet of the Venetians, weeping heavily. The doge and all the others called out with one voice, their hands reaching to the skies, and said, 'We agree! We agree!' Then there was such a great din and a great uproar that it seemed as if the earth was quaking. [29] When that great din and outpouring of pity had subsided – and no man had ever seen one greater – the good doge of Venice, who was most wise and venerable, climbed up into the pulpit to speak to the people. He said to them, 'My lords, behold the honour God has done you. The finest men in the world have rejected all other people and asked for your partner-

ship in achieving such a noble task as the deliverance of Our Lord.'

[30] I cannot recount to you all the fine and fitting words the doge said, but the matter was settled and charters were prepared the following day, duly drawn up and set in order. When this had been done our intended destination was kept a secret. Cairo had been chosen because it would be easier to destroy the Turks through an attack on Egypt rather than anywhere else, but it was announced simply that we were going overseas. At that time it was Lent, and it was settled that the barons and pilgrims should be at Venice by the feast of Saint John¹⁵ in the following year, 1202 years after the incarnation of Jesus Christ, and that the ships should be ready to receive them.

[31] When the documents had been made and sealed they were brought before the doge at the great palace where the great and small councils were gathered. And when the doge presented them with his charters, he knelt, weeping heavily, and swore on relics to uphold in good faith the terms laid out in them. All his councillors, forty-six in number, did likewise. The envoys responded with their oath to uphold the treaty in good faith, swearing on behalf of their lords and in their own right. Know that many tears of pity were shed there and that both parties immediately sent messengers to Pope Innocent at Rome so that he might confirm their agreement, which he did most willingly.¹⁶

[32] While at Venice the envoys borrowed 2,000 marks of silver and handed them over to the doge so that work on the fleet might begin. Then they took their leave in order to return to their own country and rode on, day after day, until they arrived at Piacenza in Lombardy. Geoffrey of Villehardouin and Alard Maquereau left the group there to return directly to France, while the others went to Genoa and Pisa to find out what help those cities would offer for the land overseas.

[33] As Geoffrey, marshal of Champagne, crossed the Mont Cenis pass, he met Count Walter of Brienne, who was going to Apulia to conquer lands belonging to his wife, the daughter of King Tancred,¹⁷ whom he had married since taking the cross. Walter of Montbéhard, Eustace of Conflans and Robert of

Joinville were going with him, and a large number of the high-ranking and worthy Champenois men who had taken the cross. [34] When Geoffrey told them the news of their achievements in Venice, they were overjoyed and were very pleased about how things had worked out. They said to him, 'We are already on our way, and when you return to Venice you will find all of us ready there.' But events unfold as God wishes and it so happened that they were unable to join the army later, which was a great pity since they were worthy and brave men. With this they parted ways, each continuing on their own journey.

[35] Marshal Geoffrey rode on, day after day, until he reached Troyes in Champagne, where he found his lord, Count Thibaut, sick and dispirited. But the count was gladdened by Geoffrey's arrival, and when Geoffrey had told him the news of the envoys' achievements, he was so pleased that he said he would go for a ride, which he had not done for a long while. So he got up and set out on his ride, but alas! What a great pity that was! For he never went riding again after that day.

[36] His illness increased and intensified, so much so that he made his will and testament. He divided up the money he had gathered to take on campaign among his vassals and friends, and he had many good ones — no man of his time had more. And he gave an order that each man who received some of this money should swear on relics to commit himself to the army formed at Venice, as he himself had promised to do. Many of those men did not uphold this oath, and many were rebuked as a result. The count ordered that another portion of his funds be set aside to go with the army, to be spent as and when it would be seen to be of use.

[37] Thus the count died,¹⁸ and of all the men in the world he made the finest end. A large number of his family members and vassals were gathered there. It is not fitting to describe the grief displayed on that occasion, which was greater than that ever shown for any other man. But this was just as it should have been, for no man of his age was loved more by his vassals and by others. He was buried alongside his father¹⁹ in the church of Saint Stephen at Troyes. He was survived by his

wife, the countess; her name was Blanche, and she was most beautiful and most virtuous. She was the daughter of the king of Navarre, and had borne the count a little girl and was pregnant with a son.²⁰

[38] When the count had been buried, Matthew of Montmorency, Simon of Montfort, Geoffrey of Joinville (who was seneschal of Champagne) and Marshal Geoffrey went to Duke Odo of Burgundy and said to him, 'Sir, you can see the injury the land overseas has sustained. We wish to urge you, for God's sake, to take the cross and aid the land overseas in place of the count. We would hand over all his funds to you and would swear on relics, and make others swear too, to serve you loyally, just as we would have done him.' [39] He chose to refuse. You should know that he could have chosen much better. Geoffrey of Joinville was charged with taking the same message to Count Thibaut of Bar-le-Duc, who was the cousin of the late count of Champagne. And he too refused.

[40] Count Thibaut of Champagne's death was of grave concern to the pilgrims and to all those who were due to enter God's service. They held a conference at Soissons at the end of the month²¹ to determine what they could do. In attendance were Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut, Count Louis of Blois and Chartres, Count Geoffrey of Perche, Count Hugh of Saint-Pol and many other *preudommes*.

[41] Marshal Geoffrey told them what had been said and offered to the duke of Burgundy and the count of Bar-le-Duc, and how these men had refused. 'Pay attention, my lords,' he said. 'I will give you one piece of advice, if you will allow me. Marquis Boniface of Montferrat²² is a fine *preudomme*, and one of the most highly respected men alive today. If you were to ask him to come here, to take the sign of the cross and put himself in the count of Champagne's place, and if you were to give him the leadership of the army, he would accept straightaway.' [42] Many views were expressed, both for and against, but the conclusion of the debate was one to which everyone gave their assent, both the great men and the lesser. Letters were written and messengers chosen to fetch the marquis. He came on the appointed day, via Champagne and through

France, where he was received with great honour by his cousin, the king of France, among others.

[43] He went to a conference called at Soissons, where there were a great many of the counts and barons and crusaders. When they heard that the marquis was coming they went out to meet him and showed him great honour. The next morning the conference convened in an orchard at the abbey of my lady Saint Mary of Soissons. There they asked the marquis to accept what they had offered him, pleading with him, for God's sake, to take the cross, to take up leadership of the army, to fill Thibaut of Champagne's place and to take charge of his funds and his men. They fell down at his feet, weeping heavily, and he in turn fell at their feet, saying he would do so most willingly.

[44] Thus the marquis responded to their pleas and assumed leadership of the army. Straightaway the bishop of Soissons, my lord Fulk the holy man and two Cistercian abbots whom he had brought with him from his country led him into the church of Our Lady and fastened the cross to his shoulder. And so that conference came to an end; the next day the marquis took his leave to return to his country and set his affairs in order. He said that each man should do likewise, and that he would meet them in Venice.

[45] The marquis left to attend the chapter of the Cistercians held at Cîteaux on the feast of the Holy Cross in September.²³ There he found a very large number of the abbots and barons and other people; my lord Fulk went there to preach the cross. Odo the Champenois of Champlitre and his brother William took the cross there, as did Richard of Dampierre and his brother Odo, Guy of Pesmes and his brother Aimon, Guy of Conflans and many good men from Burgundy whose names are not written down here. Then the bishop of Autun took the cross and so did Count Guy of Forez, Hugh of Berzé (both father and son of that name)²⁴ and Hugh of Coligny. Further south, in Provence, Peter Bremond also took the cross, along with a good number of others whose names are not known.

[46] Thus the barons and pilgrims were making preparations throughout many lands. But alas! What a great misfortune befell them the following Lent, just before they were due to

depart! Count Geoffrey of Perche was bedridden by illness. He made his will so that his funds and the leadership of his men within the army would pass to his brother, Stephen. The pilgrims would gladly have avoided this exchange if God had so willed it.²⁵ In this way the count met his end and died, which was truly a great loss since he was an eminent and honoured baron and a good knight. Great grief was shown throughout his lands.

CHAPTER 2

The Crusade Army at Venice

(April–September 1202)

[47] After Easter, as Pentecost approached,¹ the pilgrims began to set out from their homelands. Know that many tears of sorrow were shed as they left their lands, their people and their friends. They rode through Burgundy and across the Alps, and, having made their way via Mont Cenis and Lombardy, they started to assemble at Venice. They encamped on an island in the harbour which is named after Saint Nicholas.²

[48] Around that time a fleet left Flanders by sea, carrying a great number of good men-at-arms. The leaders of that fleet were John of Nesle the castellan of Bruges, Thierry, son of Count Philip of Flanders, and Nicholas of Mailly. They made a promise to Count Baldwin of Flanders, sworn on relics, that they would go through the Straits of Morocco³ and join the count and the army forming at Venice at whatever location they heard the army had set out for. Because of this the count and his brother Henry sent with the fleet some of their own ships, loaded with clothing and food and other provisions. [49] This fleet was very fine and well supplied. The count of Flanders and the pilgrims set great store by it since the majority of their valued sergeants departed with this fleet. But they did not keep the promise they had made to their lord and all the other pilgrims, because these men (like many others) were afraid of the great danger that the army gathered at Venice had undertaken to face.

[50] The army was let down in this way by the bishop of Autun, Count Guy of Forez, Peter Bremond and plenty of others, who were greatly blamed as a result and achieved little where they did go. Among the French, Bernard of Moreuil let

them down and so did Hugh of Chaumont, Henry of Airaines, John of Villers, Walter of Saint-Denis and his brother Hugh, and many others who refused to travel to Venice on account of the peril awaiting them there. They went instead to Marseilles. They were greatly dishonoured and heavily blamed for this, and they encountered great misfortune afterwards.

[51] Now we will leave these men aside to tell you about the pilgrims, of whom a large number had already arrived at Venice. Count Baldwin of Flanders had already come, along with many others. News reached them there that large numbers of the pilgrims had taken other routes to other ports, and this prompted great concern because they would not be able to keep their side of the treaty or pay the money they owed to the Venetians.

[52] The leaders at Venice decided among themselves that they should send trustworthy envoys to Count Louis of Blois and Chartres and to the other pilgrims who had not yet arrived to reassure them and to implore them to have pity on the land overseas, as well as to warn them that no other route held the prospect of success except that via Venice. [53] Count Hugh of Saint-Pol and Geoffrey, marshal of Champagne, were chosen as envoys. They rode out to Pavia in Lombardy, where they found Count Louis with a great many good knights and good men. Through their words of reassurance and entreaty they steered significant numbers of men towards Venice who had been going to other ports by other routes.

[54] Nonetheless, many good men left at Piacenza to follow alternative routes that took them to Apulia. Among them was Villain of Nully, who was one of the best knights in the world, Henry of Arzillières, Renaud of Dampierre, Henry of Longchamp and Gilles of Trazegnies. He was Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut's liegeman, to whom the count had given 500 *livres* of his own money so that he might join him on the expedition. Along with these men went a great many knights and sergeants whose names are not written down here.

[55] This meant that many fewer people went to join the army at Venice which – as you will hear later – met with great misfortune as a result.

[56] Thus Count Louis and the other barons arrived at Venice, where they were received with great celebration and joy, and set up camp on the island of Saint Nicholas with the others. The army was a most impressive one, made up of worthy men; no one has ever seen an army more impressive or with so many combatants. The Venetians opened markets for them that were sufficiently well stocked to meet all the needs of men and horses. The fleet they had prepared was so well equipped and handsome that no Christian man has ever seen another more handsome or better equipped, and in fact there were enough *nefs*, galleys and horse transports for at least three times the number of people in the army.

[57] Oh! What great damage was done when the others who went to different ports did not go to Venice! Christendom would certainly have been exalted and the land of the Turks laid low. The Venetians had fulfilled their side of the agreement very well and done more besides, and now that they were ready to get under way they called on the counts and the barons to uphold their side of the agreement and pay them their money. [58] Fees for passage were sought within the army. There were numerous people who said they could not pay their own way in full, and the barons took whatever they could get from them. In this way people in the army paid the cost of their passage – as far as they could – when the barons requested it. But once these payments had been collected, the barons did not have even half the sum they needed.

[59] The barons conferred among themselves and they said, 'Sirs, the Venetians have upheld our agreement to the letter and have done more besides, but we do not have nearly enough people to pay them what we owe with fees for passage. This is the fault of those who went to other ports. So each of us should, for God's sake, give some of our own money so that we might meet our commitments. It would be better for us to hand over all our money than to default – which would mean that we would forfeit all we have raised and that we would have broken our agreement – for if the army disbands the delivery of the land overseas will be abandoned.' [60] There were strong objections to this from the majority of the barons and of the

other people. They said, 'We have paid for our passage. If the Venetians are willing to take us, we will gladly go. But if they are not willing, we will take care of ourselves and make our way by other means.' They said this because they wanted the army to disband. Those on the opposing side said, 'We would rather offer all our money and set out with the army in poverty than see it broken up and destroyed, for God will certainly repay us when it pleases him.'

[61] The count of Flanders began to hand over whatever he had and whatever he could borrow. Count Louis did likewise and so did Marquis Boniface, Count Hugh of Saint-Pol, and those who supported their party. You would have seen many beautiful dishes of gold and silver carried to the doge's lodgings as payment. When they had paid what they could they still lacked 34,000 marks of silver from what they owed. This was very pleasing to those who had held on to their money, not wishing to offer anything, since they were sure the army would be abandoned and broken up. But God, who gives hope to the hopeless, did not wish this to happen.

[62] The doge spoke to his people, saying, 'My lords, these men cannot pay us anything more. Whatever we have been paid by them is ours to keep under the terms of an agreement they cannot now fulfil. But our right to it would not be upheld by everyone, rather we and our country would be soundly blamed. So let's make them an offer. [63] The king of Hungary has captured Zara in Slavonia⁴ from us, which is one of the strongest cities in the world. We will never recover the city with our own forces except we have the help of these men. Let's ask them to help us take Zara, in return for which we will suspend their debt to us of 34,000 marks of silver until such time as God allows us and the pilgrims to win sufficient booty together.' These were the terms on which the offer was made. There was much opposition from those who wanted the army to disband, but the agreement was made and confirmed nonetheless.

[64] They gathered one Sunday in the church of Saint Mark where a great feast was being celebrated⁵ with the Venetians and most of the barons and pilgrims in attendance. [65] Before high Mass had begun the doge of Venice, whose name was

Enrico Dandolo, climbed up into the pulpit and spoke to his people, saying, 'My lords, you are joined with the finest men in the world in the most noble endeavour anyone has ever undertaken. I am an old and weak man and am in need of rest - my body is ailing. But I see that no one knows how to lead and command you as I, your lord, can. If you are willing to consent to my taking the sign of the cross in order to protect and guide you, while my son stays here to defend this land in my place, I will go to live or die with you and the pilgrims.'

[66] And when they heard this, everyone cried out with one voice, 'We beg you for God's sake to do so, to go ahead and come with us.' [67] There was a great outpouring of compassion among the Venetians and the pilgrims, and many tears were shed because this *preudomme* had such good reason to stay. He was an old man, and although he had handsome eyes in his head, he could not see at all, having lost his eyesight after sustaining a head wound.⁶ But he had plenty of heart. Oh! How unlike him were the people who had gone to other ports, wanting to stay out of harm's way!

[68] He then stepped down from the pulpit and went before the altar. Weeping heavily, he got down on his knees and a cross was sewn on to a large cotton cap for him. This was because he wanted people to be able to see it. The Venetians began to take the cross in great throngs and large numbers; only a very small number of them had taken the cross up to that day. Our pilgrims were overjoyed and greatly moved by the doge's cross-taking, on account of his wisdom and accomplishments.

[69] The doge took the cross as you have heard, and then the *nefs*, galleys and horse transports began to be handed over to the barons for departure. So much time had already passed that September was upon us.

[70] Now you will hear about one of the most amazing and most momentous occurrences of which you have ever been told. At that time there was an emperor at Constantinople whose name was Isaac. He had a brother whose name was Alexius,⁷ whom he had ransomed from a Turkish prison. This Alexius seized his brother the emperor, put the eyes out of his head and made himself emperor through the treacherous act of which

you were just told. Alexius kept Isaac in captivity for a long time along with one of his sons, who was also called Alexius. This son later escaped from prison and fled in a boat to a coastal city called Ancona. From there Alexius went to King Philip of Germany, who had married his sister.⁸ He came to Verona in Lombardy and stayed for a while in that town, where he encountered numerous pilgrims who were on their way to join the army.

[71] The people who had helped Alexius escape and who remained with him, said to him, 'Sir, take note that there is an army close by at Venice of the finest men and the best knights in the world, who are going overseas. You should appeal to them to take pity on you and your father, who were so unjustly dispossessed. If they are willing to help you, you should do whatever they ask of you. There's a chance they might be moved by your plight.' Alexius said that he would do this very gladly and that their advice was sound.

[72] And so he chose his messengers and sent them to Marquis Boniface of Montferrat,⁹ who was the leader of the army, and to the other barons. When the barons gave them an audience, they were greatly taken aback by what they heard and replied, 'We quite understand what you're saying. We will send envoys to King Philip in company with Alexius, who is on his way there now. If Alexius is willing to aid us in the recovery of the land overseas, we will help him conquer his lands, which we understand were usurped unjustly from him and his father.' Thus envoys were sent to Germany, to the young prince from Constantinople and to King Philip of Germany.

[73] Before the events we have just described, news arrived in the host which greatly saddened the barons and the other people; lord Fulk the holy man, the saintly man who had first preached the cross, had met his end and had died.

[74] Following this episode a company of very fine men from the German empire arrived, which was a cause for great joy. The bishop of Halberstadt had come, along with Count Berthold of Katzenellenbogen, Werner of Borlanden, Dietrich of Looz, Henry of Ulm, Dietrich of Diest, Roger of Suitre, Alexander of Villers and Wierich of Daun.

CHAPTER 3

The Conquest of Zara

(October 1202–March 1203)

[75] Then the ships and the horse transports were distributed among the barons. Ah, God! What fine warhorses were put on board! When the ships had been loaded with arms and food, and the knights and sergeants had embarked, their shields were hung round the sides and on the ships' castles alongside their banners, of which there were many splendid ones. [76] Know that they were carrying more than 300 petrarries and mangonels in those ships, and many of every kind of machine useful for capturing a city. No finer fleet ever set sail from any port. This took place during the week following the feast of Saint Rémy, 1202 years after the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Thus they left the harbour at Venice, as you have just heard.

[77] On the eve of the feast of Saint Martin,² they arrived before Zara in Slavonia and saw the city fortified with lofty walls and tall towers; you would have sought a finer, stronger, more impressive city in vain. And when the pilgrims saw it they were greatly astounded and said to one another, 'How could such a city be taken by force, unless God himself brought it about?'

[78] The first ships to arrive before the city dropped anchor to wait for the others. The following morning the weather was particularly fine and clear, and all the galleys arrived along with the horse transports and other ships behind them. They took the harbour by force, breaking the chain³ (which was a very strong and well-made one), and then went ashore on the opposite side of the port from the city. You would then have seen many knights and many sergeants come out of the ships, and many fine warhorses unloaded from the horse transports along

with many fine tents and many pavilions. The army thus set up camp and laid siege to Zara on the feast of Saint Martin.

[79] At that point not all the barons had arrived. The marquis of Montferrat had not yet come; he had stayed behind to attend to some business of his own. Stephen of Perche remained unwell and at Venice, and Matthew of Montmorency likewise. When they had recovered, Matthew of Montmorency came to join the army at Zara. But Stephen of Perche did not act so properly, for he abandoned the army and went to spend some time in Apulia. With him went Rotrou of Montfort and Yves of la Jaille, as well as many others who were scorned as a result. They took the March passage to Syria.⁴

[80] The day after the feast of Saint Martin some of Zara's people left the city and came to talk to the doge of Venice, who was in his pavilion. They told him they would surrender the city and all their possessions to his authority if their lives would be spared. And the doge said that he would in no way accept this offer or any other unless it was done on the advice of the counts and barons; he would go and discuss the matter with them.

[81] While he went to speak to the counts and barons, the army of men you have heard about before, who wanted the doge to disband, talked to the messengers from Zara, saying, 'Why do you want to surrender your city? The pilgrims won't attack you, you have nothing to fear from them. If you can defend yourselves against the Venetians, you'll be safe.' One of these men, whose name was Robert of Boves, was chosen to go to the walls of the town and spread the same word there. Then the messengers returned to the city, and negotiations were suspended.

[82] When the doge of Venice came to the counts and barons, he said to them, 'My lords, the people inside want to surrender the city to my power if their lives will be spared. I will not accept this offer or any other unless it is on your advice.' And the barons replied to him, 'Sir, we advise you to accept, and moreover we urge you to do so.' He said he would do this. They all returned together to the doge's pavilion to conclude the agreement, only to find that the messengers had already left on the advice of those who wanted the army to break up.

[83] The abbot of Vaux^s (a Cistercian monastery) then stood up and said to them, 'My lords, on behalf of the Roman Pope I forbid you to lay siege to this city. For it is a Christian city and you are pilgrims.' When the doge heard this he was greatly angered and annoyed. He said to the counts and barons, 'My lords, this city was ready to submit to me and your men have taken it from me. You made an agreement with me to help me capture it, and I now call on you to do so.'

[84] The counts and barons and those who supported their party all began to speak at once, 'Those who sabotaged this agreement have acted outrageously; not a day has passed without them working to break up the army. We will be shamed if we do not help him take the city.' They went to the doge and said to him, 'Sir, we will help you capture the city in spite of those who are against it.'

[85] Thus their decision was made. The next morning they went and made camp in front of the gates of the city, setting up their petraries and mangonels and other engines, of which they had a great number. On the seaward side of the city scaling ladders were mounted on the ships. The petraries began to take shots at the walls and towers of the city. This assault lasted a good five days. Then they set the miners to work on one of the towers where they began to undermine the wall. When those inside saw this they asked for a truce on the same terms they had rejected because of the advice of those who wanted the army to break up.

[86] In this way the town was surrendered to the authority of the Venetian doge and the lives of the inhabitants spared. The doge came to the counts and barons and said to them, 'My lords, we have captured this city through God's grace and your own. Winter has come and we won't be able to set out from here until Easter since we wouldn't find a source of provisions anywhere else. This city is very rich and well stocked with all we might need; let's divide the town in two, one half for us and the other for you.' [87] This was done as had been agreed. The Venetians had the half of the city towards the port, where the ships were anchored, and the French had the other. Then the lodgings on each side were allocated appropriately,

and the army decamped and came to take up quarters inside the city.

[88] On the third day after they had taken up their lodgings, a great calamity struck the army around the hour of vespers. A fight broke out between some of the Venetians and the French, a very widespread and very fierce one. Men were running to arms throughout the city, and the commotion was so great that there were few streets where there was not intense fighting with swords, lances, crossbows and bolts. Many people were wounded or killed.

[89] But the Venetians could not continue to fight; they began to lose heavily. The *preudommes* of the army, wishing to put an end to this wickedness, came fully armed into the midst of the brawl and began to break it up. Having put a stop to the fight in one place, they had to start the process again in another. This situation lasted well into the night, and it was only with great effort and great suffering that the fighting was broken up everywhere. Know that this was the greatest cause for grief any army ever knew; the whole force could easily have been lost. But God would not permit it.

[90] Great losses were suffered on both sides. A high-ranking Flemish man called Giles of Landas was killed there; he was struck in the eye and died of this wound in the course of the fight along with many others whose deaths were less widely spoken of. The doge of Venice and the barons had to work hard all the following week to keep the peace in the wake of this brawl, but their efforts were sufficient so that peace was maintained, thanks be to God.

[91] Two weeks later Marquis Boniface of Montferrat arrived (he had been absent until then), as did Matthew of Montmorency, Peter of Bracieux and many other *preudommes*. After another two weeks the envoys arrived from Germany who had been sent by King Philip and the young prince of Constantinople. The barons and the doge of Venice gathered at a palace where the doge had taken up residence. The messengers began to speak, saying, 'Sirs, we have been sent to you by King Philip and the son of the emperor of Constantinople, the brother of the king's wife.'

[92] "My lords," says the king, "I am sending you my wife's brother, and in doing so I place him in the hands of God – may he save the young man from death – and in yours. Since you have left home in the cause of God, right and justice, you should, if you are able, restore their inheritance to those who have been wrongly dispossessed. And Alexius will offer you the most favourable terms ever offered to anyone and give you the greatest possible assistance in conquering the land overseas. [93] First, if God permits you to restore him to his inheritance, he will place the entire empire of Romania in obedience to Rome, from which it has formerly been cut off. Secondly, he understands that you have spent your own money and that you are now poor. Therefore, he will give you 200,000 marks of silver and provisions for the whole army, both the great men and the lesser. He will also go with you in person to the land of Egypt, accompanied by 10,000 men (or he will send them at his expense, if you think that would be better). He will provide you with such service for one year. And throughout his life he will maintain 500 knights in the land overseas, supported with his own money."

[94] 'Sirs,' said the envoys, 'we have been given full authority to conclude these negotiations if you wish to go ahead on your part. You should know that no offer so large has ever been made to anyone; he who refuses it has no great urge for conquest.' The counts and barons told them that they would discuss the matter, and a council was held the following day. When they had all assembled the envoys' offer was laid before them.

[95] Many points of view were expressed. The Cistercian abbot of Vaux spoke along with those who wanted the army to disband. They said they could not agree to this at all, for they would be campaigning against Christians. This was certainly not what they had set out to do; they wanted to go to Syria instead. [96] Those on the other side responded, 'Dear lords, you cannot achieve anything in Syria, as you can well see from the example of those who abandoned us to take themselves off to other ports. You should know that if the land overseas is ever to be recovered, it will be achieved by way of either Egypt or Greece, and that if we reject this treaty we will be forever shamed.'

[97] And so the army was in discord. You should not be surprised that the laymen were in disagreement, since the white monks of the Cistercian order within the army were equally divided. The abbot of Loos,⁶ who was a very holy man and a *preudomme*, and other abbots who sided with him preached sermons and urged people for God's sake to keep the army together and to go along with the treaty, for this was the means by which the land overseas could most easily be recovered. And in turn the abbot of Vaux and those who followed him preached very frequently, saying that all this was wrong and that they would rather go to the land of Syria and do what they could there.

[98] At that point Marquis Boniface of Montferrat asserted his position together with Baldwin, count of Flanders and Hainaut, Count Louis of Blois and Count Hugh of Saint-Pol and their followers. They said they would support the treaty; it would be dishonourable to refuse it. Then they went to the doge's residence, the king of Germany's envoys were summoned and the leaders of the army confirmed the agreement, as it was described to you earlier, with sworn oaths and sealed charters.

[99] This book's report to you is that only twelve oaths were sworn by the French party;⁷ no more could be secured. Among those to swear were the marquis of Montferrat, Count Baldwin of Flanders, Count Louis of Blois and Chartres, Count Hugh of Saint-Pol and eight other men who sided with them. In this way the treaty was concluded, the charters drawn up and the time fixed when the young prince should arrive: two weeks after Easter.

[100] Thus the French army stayed for the whole of that winter at Zara, opposed by the king of Hungary. Know that men's hearts knew no peace, for one group strove to break up the army and the other to keep it together.

[101] Many of the rank and file ran away in merchants' ships. A good 500 made off in one ship; all of them drowned and were lost. Another group ran away over land, thinking to escape through Slavonia, but the peasants of that land attacked them and killed a good number of them. The rest fled back to the army. In this way the army was severely depleted with each

passing day. Around the same time one man of high rank in the army, Werner of Borlanden from Germany, arranged to be taken away in a merchant ship and abandoned the army; he was greatly blamed for this.

[102] It was not long after this that one of the high-ranking French barons, Renaud of Montmirail, who had the support of Count Louis, begged to be sent as a messenger to Syria in one of the fleet's ships. He swore with his right hand on relics (all the knights going with him did the same) that within two weeks of arriving in Syria and having passed on their message they would return to the army. With this agreement he left the army along with his nephew Hervé of Châteauneuf, William the vidame of Chartres, Geoffrey of Beaumont, John of Frouville and his brother Peter and many others. But they did not keep the oaths they swore at all well, for they did not return to the army.

[103] Then some news arrived in the camp which was very gladly received. This was that the Flemish fleet you heard about earlier⁸ had arrived at Marseilles. John of Nesle the castellan of Bruges (the leader of that force), Thierry the son of Count Philip of Flanders and Nicholas of Maily informed the count of Flanders, their lord, that they would spend the winter at Marseilles and that he should let them know his wishes so that they might do as he commanded. Having taken advice from the doge of Venice and from the other barons, he ordered them to set sail at the end of March and to come to meet him at the port of Modon in Romania. But alas! They were untrue to their word and never fulfilled this agreement with the barons. Instead they went to Syria, where they knew they would not achieve anything. [104] Now you may know, my lords, that if God had not loved this army it could certainly not have held together, seeing as so many people wished it ill.

[105] The barons conferred among themselves and decided they would send envoys to the pope at Rome because he harboured ill feeling towards them on account of the capture of Zara. Two knights and two clerics whom the barons knew would be capable of this mission were chosen as the messengers. One of the clerics was Bishop Nivelon of Soissons, and the other

Master John of Noyon, who was Count Baldwin of Flanders's chancellor. Of the knights one was John of Friaize and the other Robert of Boves. They swore faithfully on relics to deliver their message in good faith and to return to the army.

[106] Three of them kept their word well and the fourth badly. This was Robert of Boves, who carried out his mission in the worst possible way, broke his promise and took himself off to Syria after the others. The other three did very well and delivered their message just as the barons had requested, saying to the pope, 'The barons beg you to forgive them for the capture of Zara. They did this as men would who had no better option, and this was because of the defection of those who had gone to other ports and because otherwise they would not have been able to keep the army together. And they call on you, as they would their loving father, to give them your orders, which they are ready to obey.'

[107] The pope told the envoys that he knew well that they were constrained to do this because of others' failings. He had great pity for them on this account and sent his greetings to the barons and pilgrims, telling them that he absolved them as his sons.⁹ He instructed them and begged them to keep the army together because he well understood that without that army no service to God could be performed. And he gave full authority to Bishop Nivelon of Soissons and Master John of Noyon to bind and loose the pilgrims until such time as the cardinal joined the army.

CHAPTER 4

From Zara to Constantinople

(April—June 1203)

[108] So much time had passed that Lent had already arrived. The barons prepared their fleet to sail at Easter.¹ When the ships were loaded, on the day after Easter, the pilgrims set up camp outside the town by the port, while the Venetians razed the city to the ground along with its towers and walls.

[109] And then an episode unfolded which was of grave concern to the people in the army. One of the high-ranking barons, whose name was Simon of Montfort, had made a pact with the king of Hungary, who was an enemy of the army, to go over to his side and abandon the army. With him went his brother Guy of Montfort, Simon of Neauphle, Robert Mauvoisin, Dreux of Cressonsacq, the abbot of Vaux (who was a monk of the Cistercian order) and many others. And it was not long after this that another high-ranking man in the army called Enguerrand of Boves left with his brother Hugh. They took with them as many people from their country as they could.

[110] These people left the army as you have heard. This was a great injury to the army and a shame to those who inflicted it. Then the ships and transports began to set sail, and it was decided that they should take port at Corfu, an island that was part of Romania. Those who arrived first would await those who followed until they had all gathered. And so they did.

[111] Before the doge and the marquis set off from the harbour at Zara with the galleys, Alexius, son of Emperor Isaac of Constantinople, arrived there having been sent by King Philip of Germany. He was welcomed with very great joy and very great honour. The doge provided him with such galleys and

vessels as he needed, and thus they set sail from the port of Zara. With a good wind they sailed as far as Durazzo, where the inhabitants surrendered the town to their lord very willingly when they saw him, and swore their loyalty to him.

[112] They set sail from Durazzo and arrived at Corfu where they found the army encamped in front of the town, with tents and pavilions set up and horses taken ashore from the transports to be fed and exercised. And when they heard that the emperor of Constantinople's son had arrived, you would have seen many good knights and good sergeants rush to greet him leading many fine warhorses. Thus Alexius was welcomed with very great joy and very great honour. He pitched his tent in the middle of the camp, and the marquis of Montferrat set his own up next to it; King Philip had entrusted Alexius, whose sister he had married, to the marquis's care.

[113] They remained on that most rich and fertile island for three weeks, but during their stay a hard and onerous misfortune befell them. A large number of those who wanted the army to break up and who had previously worked to undermine it talked among themselves and said that this expedition seemed to them likely to be very long and very dangerous, and so they would stay on the island and let the army leave. With help from the people of Corfu they would, once the army had departed, send word to Count Walter of Brienne, who held Brindisi at that time, that he should send ships to take them there.

[114] I cannot give you the names of all those involved in this affair. But I will tell you the names of some of the main ringleaders. They included Odo the Champenois of Champlitte, James of Avesnes, Peter of Amiens, Guy the castellan of Coucy, Ogier of Saint-Chéron, Guy of Chappes and his nephew Clarembaut, William of Aulnay, Peter Coiseau, Guy of Pesmes and his brother Aimon, Guy of Conflans, Richard of Dampierre and his brother Odo, and many others who assured them privately that they would join their party but who dared not do so openly out of shame. And indeed this book bears witness that more than half the army were in agreement with them.

[115] When the marquis of Montferrat and Count Baldwin of Flanders, Count Louis and the count of Saint-Pol, and the

barons who sided with them heard about this they were greatly distressed and said, 'Sirs, we are in a wretched situation: if these men leave us, in addition to those who already have done so at numerous other points, our army will be doomed and we will be unable to conquer anything. Let's go to them and beg them for God's sake to take pity on themselves and on us, to resist dishonouring themselves and not to impede the delivery of the land overseas.'

[116] This plan was agreed upon and they all went together to a valley where the other party was in conference, taking with them the emperor of Constantinople's son and all the bishops and abbots in the army. When they arrived in the valley they got down on foot and the members of the other party, seeing them arrive, dismounted from their horses and went to meet them. The barons fell at their feet, weeping heavily, and said they would not move until the men there had promised not to leave them.

[117] And when these men saw this they felt great compassion and wept bitterly to see their lords, their relations and their friends fall at their feet. They said that they would discuss the matter, and took themselves aside to confer. The conclusion of their discussion was that they would stay with the barons until the feast of Saint Michael² on condition that the barons would swear on relics, as was customary, that at whatever point after that date the others should so request it, the barons would within two weeks, in good faith and without any trickery, provide them with a fleet that would take them to Syria. [118] This pact was approved and sealed with sworn oaths. And there was then great joy throughout the army, and the people returned to the ships and the horses were put into the transports.

[119] They left the port of Corfu on the eve of Pentecost³ 1203 years after the incarnation of Our Lord Jesus Christ. All the army's *nefs*, all its horse transports and all its galleys were gathered there, along with a good number of other merchant ships that set sail with them. The day was fine and clear, the wind pleasant and gentle. They unfurled their sails to the wind. [120] Geoffrey, marshal of Champagne — who dictated this

work without ever knowingly telling a lie, and was present at all the councils it records — gives sure witness that such a beautiful sight was never seen. It certainly seemed that this was a fleet destined to conquer lands far, as far as the eye could see, all that could be seen were the sails of ships and other vessels and this filled men's hearts with joy.

[121] Thus they sailed the sea until they reached Cape Malea and the straits in the sea⁴ there, where they came across two ships carrying pilgrims, knights and sergeants who were on their way back from Syria. These were some of the people who had sailed from the port of Marseilles. When they saw the fleet, so beautiful and well-equipped, they were so ashamed that they dared not show themselves. Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut sent his ship's boat to find out who these people were, and they identified themselves. [122] One sergeant let himself down over the side of the ship into the boat. He called out to the people on board the ship, 'Whatever belongings of mine are still on board are yours. I'm going with these men, since it looks certain they must conquer lands.' This was a great credit to the sergeant and he was warmly welcomed in the army. And it is because of this that it is said that one can turn back from a thousand wicked ways.

[123] The army sailed on as far as Negroponte,⁵ which is a very fine island with a very fine town, also called Negroporte. The barons held a council there, and Marquis Boniface of Montferrat and Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut set out with a large number of the transports and galleys, taking Emperor Isaac's son to an island called Andros. When they came ashore the knights in this party armed themselves and overran the land. The people of the island surrendered themselves to Emperor Isaac's son, and gave him enough of their wealth to make peace with him.

[124] They got back on board their ships and made their way across the sea. A great misfortune then befell them; a high-ranking man called Guy, the castellan of Coucy, died and his body was cast into the sea.

[125] The other ships, those that had not turned off along that course, had entered the mouth of the Abydos channel,

where the Straits of Saint George enter the open sea.⁶ They sailed up the straits to the very fine and well-situated city of Abydos, which sits on the side of the Straits of Saint George that lay towards the land of the Turks. They took port there and went ashore, and the people of the city came out to meet them and surrendered the town to them, as if they dared not try to defend it. And the army protected the town very well, so that its inhabitants did not lose even a *denier's* worth of their property. [126] They stayed there for a week to wait for the *nefs*, galleys and transports that were yet to arrive. During that time they collected grain from the land since it was harvest time. They had great need of it because their supplies were low. In the course of that week all the ships and the barons arrived; God gave them fair weather.

[127] Then they all set sail together from the port of Abydos, and you could have seen the Straits of Saint George to the east abloom with *nefs* and galleys and transports; it was a wondrous thing to behold this beautiful sight. And so they sailed up the Straits of Saint George until they reached the abbey of Saint Stephen, three leagues from Constantinople. There the people on board the *nefs*, galleys and transports had a full view of Constantinople. They took port and anchored their vessels.

[128] Now you may be assured that those who had never seen Constantinople before gazed at it for a long time, barely believing there was such a great city in all the world. They saw its high walls and mighty towers, with which the city was completely encircled, as well as the fine palaces and impressive churches, of which there were so many that none could believe it if he did not see it with his own eyes, and they could be seen the length and breadth of the city, which is the sovereign of all others. Know that there was no man there so bold that his flesh did not tremble, which should come as no surprise for never was such a great project undertaken by as many men⁷ since the creation of the world.

[129] The counts and the barons and the doge of Venice then went ashore and held a conference in the church of Saint Stephen. Many opinions were stated and heard there. This book cannot recount to you all the arguments that were made, but

the conclusion of the council came when the doge of Venice rose to his feet and said to them, [130] 'My lords, I know more about the situation in this country than you do, for I have been here before.⁸ Yours is the most pressing business and the most perilous enterprise any men have ever undertaken, and because of this it is necessary for us to proceed carefully. You should know that if we were to make our way over land, the territory is vast and open and as our people are poor and short of supplies, they would spread out across the land looking for food. There is a very large population in this country, and we would not be able to keep watch over everyone and not lose some of them, which is the last thing we need since we have so few people for the task we wish to fulfil. [131] There are islands nearby – you can see them from here – which are inhabited and where grain and meat and other useful things are raised. Let's go there to take port, and we will collect the land's grain and produce, and when we have gathered provisions, we will go before Constantinople and do whatever Our Lord has planned for us. For those who are well supplied make war more confidently than those who have no provisions.' The counts and the barons agreed to this advice, and they all returned to their *nefs* and other vessels.

[132] They rested that night and in the mornings, on the feast of my lord John the Baptist celebrated in June,⁹ their banners and pennons were hoisted on the ships' castles and their shields uncovered and hung from the sides of the ships. Each man examined the weapons he needed to fulfil his duties, knowing that they would be put to use before long. [133] The sailors raised the anchors and unfurled the sails to the wind. God gave them a good wind, such as they needed, and they came before Constantinople, passing so close to the walls and the towers that they could take shots at many of the Greek ships. There were so many people on the walls and on the towers that it seemed as if the whole population of the city was there.

[134] But it was Our Lord God's will that they reverse the decision taken the previous evening to go to the islands – it was as if no one had ever heard mention of it. They made for the mainland as directly as possible and took port in front of one

of Emperor Alexius's palaces, at a place called Chalcedon which was opposite Constantinople on the other side of the straits, towards the land of the Turks. This was one of the most beautiful and charming palaces any eyes might ever have seen, with all the physical comforts a princely residence should have.

[135] The counts and the barons went ashore and set up lodgings in the palace and in the surrounding town, most of them putting up their pavilions. Then the horses were brought out of the transports, and the knights and sergeants disembarked with all their arms, so that the only men left in the ships were the sailors. The region was beautiful and prosperous and abundant in all things; the mounds of freshly harvested grain left in the fields were sufficient for everyone to take as much as they wanted, and these were people who had great need of it.

[136] They stayed at the palace the following day and on their third day at Chalcedon, God granted them a good wind; the sailors weighed their anchors and unfurled their sails to the wind, so that they could sail against the current one league above Constantinople, to another palace of Emperor Alexius's, called Scutari. There they anchored the *nefs* and the transports and all the galleys. The knights who had been lodged in the palace at Chalcedon came overland along the coast.

[137] And so the French army encamped by the Straits of Saint George, at Scutari and further up the coast. When Emperor Alexius saw this he had his own forces come out of Constantinople to install themselves on the other bank, opposite them. He had his tents erected so that his opponents might not come ashore in strength against him. The French army remained thus for nine days and those who had need of provisions — and that was everyone in the camp — sought them out.

[138] During this period a company of very good men went out from the camp in order to keep guard over it so that no one could attack it. They also protected the foragers and reconnoitred the surrounding area. Among that company were Odo the Champenois of Champlitte and his brother William, Ogier of Saint-Chéron, Manassiers of l'Isle and Count Gerard, who came from Lombardy and was one of the marquis of

Montferrat's men. They had with them at least eighty knights, all of whom were very good men.

[139] They spotted tents at the foot of the mountain, a good three leagues away from the camp. This was the emperor of Constantinople's lord admiral,¹⁰ who had at least 500 Greek knights. When our men saw them they formed their forces into four battalions and decided to go and attack the Greeks. When the Greeks saw them they formed their forces into battalions and lined up in front of the tents, waiting. And our men charged at them very vigorously. [140] With the help of Our Lord God this skirmish was over quickly; the Greeks turned their backs, routed at the first clash, and our men chased them for a good long league. They won a great number of warhorses, rouncies, palfreys, he-mules and she-mules, tents and pavilions, and such booty as you would expect in such a situation. And so they went back to the camp, where people were very pleased to see them, and they divided up their winnings as was fitting.

[141] On the following day Emperor Alexius sent a messenger with a letter to the counts and barons. This messenger was called Nicholas Rosso and he had been born in Lombardy. He found the barons in the fine palace at Scutari, where they were in conference, and he greeted them on behalf of Emperor Alexius of Constantinople, delivering his letter to Marquis Boniface of Montferrat. The marquis accepted it and it was read aloud in front of all the barons. This book will not report all the many passages of the letter, but after all its other contents came the notification of credence, so that we might have faith in the man who had brought the letter, whose name was Nicholas Rosso.

[142] 'Dear sir,' said the barons, 'we have examined your letter, which tells us we should credit what you say, and we certainly will do so. Now, speak as you wish.' [143] Standing before the barons the messenger said, 'My lords, Emperor Alexius informs you that he knows well that you are the best of men among those who do not wear crowns, from the best land there is, and he is deeply perplexed as to why or for what purpose you have come to his lands and to his kingdom. You

are Christian, he is Christian and he well understands that you set out to recover the Holy Land overseas, the Holy Cross and the Sepulchre. If you are poor and needy he will gladly give you some provisions and some money, and then you can leave his lands. He does not wish to do you any harm, but he has the power to do so. For, if you had twenty times as many men you would not be able to escape if he wished you ill; you would be killed and destroyed.'

[144] With the agreement and the advice of the other barons and the doge of Venice, Conon of Béthune – who was a fine knight, and wise and eloquent – rose to his feet and replied to the messenger, 'Dear sir, you have told us that your lord is deeply perplexed as to why our lords and our barons have entered his kingdom and his lands. They have not entered his kingdom or his lands at all, since he holds them wrongfully and as a sin against God and against justice. This kingdom and these lands belong to his nephew, son of his brother Isaac, who is seated among us on a throne here. But if he wishes to offer himself to the mercy of his nephew and return to him the crown and the empire, we will urge the young man to pardon him and grant him sufficient means to live richly. And if it is not to deliver such a message, do not be so bold as to come back here again.' Then the messenger left and went back to Constantinople, to Emperor Alexius.

[145] The barons discussed the matter among themselves and announced the next day that they would show Alexius, the son of the emperor of Constantinople, to the people of the city. And so they had all the galleys armed, and the doge of Venice and the marquis of Montferrat boarded one of them taking Alexius, the son of Emperor Isaac, with them. Those knights and barons who wished to go boarded the other galleys.

[146] And so they went right up to the walls of Constantinople and showed the young prince to the Greek people, saying, 'Behold your natural lord, and know that we do not come to do you harm; rather we come to protect you and to defend you if you will do as you ought. For the man you are obeying as your lord rules you wrongfully, and thus sins against God and justice; you well know how disloyally he behaved

towards his own lord, towards his own brother, by blinding him and by unjustly and sinfully depriving him of his empire. Behold here the rightful heir. If you side with him you will be doing your duty, and if you do not do so, we will do our worst to you.' Not a single person of that land or of that country gave any sign that they sided with the young prince, out of fear and dread of Emperor Alexius.¹¹ And so the galleys turned back to the camp and each man went to his quarters.

[147] The next day, once the barons had heard Mass, they gathered for a conference which was held on horseback in the middle of the fields. You could have seen many handsome warhorses there, and many knights mounted on them. This council was held to discuss how many battalions and of what sort they should have. There was lively debate of one proposal and another, but the conclusion of the conference was that the vanguard was entrusted to Count Baldwin of Flanders, since he had a very large number of good men, archers and cross-bowmen, more than any other man in the army.

[148] Afterwards it was decided that the count's brother Henry should form the second battalion with Matthew of Walincourt, Baldwin of Beauvoir, and many other fine knights who were with them from their lands and from their country. [149] The third battalion was formed by Count Hugh of Saint-Pol, his nephew Peter of Amiens, Eustace of Canteleux, Anseau of Cayeux, and many fine knights from their lands and their country. [150] The fourth battalion was led by Count Louis of Blois and Chartres, and it was very large and powerful and feared since he had a very great number of good knights and good men there. [151] The fifth battalion was formed by Matthew of Montmorency and the Champenois: Marshal Geoffrey of Champagne was a member of this battalion along with Ogier of Saint-Chéron, Manassiers of l'Isle, Milon le Bréban, Macaire of Sainte-Menehould, John Foison, Guy of Chappes and his nephew Clarendaubaut, and Robert of Ronsoy. All of these men made up the fifth battalion, and you should know that there were many fine knights in it. [152] The sixth battalion was formed by the men of Burgundy. Odo the Champenois of Champlitte was in this battalion with his brother William,

Richard of Dampierre and his brother Odo, Guy of Pesmes and his brother Aimon, Othon of la Roche, Guy of Conflans and the men from their lands and their country. [153] The seventh, very large, battalion was led by Marquis Boniface of Montferrier. This one was made up of the Lombards, the Tuscans, the Germans, and all the men from the region between the mountain of Mont Cenis and Lyons, on the Rhône. All of these men were in the marquis's battalion, and it was settled that it should have the rearguard.

[154] They appointed a day on which they would re-embark the *nefs* and other vessels in order to storm the shore, and either live or die. And you should know that this was one of the most hazardous enterprises ever undertaken. The bishops and clergymen spoke to the people, explaining to them that each of them should make his confession and draw up his will, since they did not know when God would summon them to him. And men throughout the army did this most willingly and most piously.

CHAPTER 5

The First Siege of Constantinople

(July–August 1203)

[155] The appointed day arrived and all the knights entered the transports with their warhorses. The knights were fully armed, with their helmets laced, and the horses were caparisoned and saddled. The other people, those who did not play such an important role in battle, all went aboard the large *nefs*, while every galley was armed and made ready.

[156] It was a fine morning, a little after sunrise. Emperor Alexius awaited them with numerous battalions and a vast array of equipment on the other side of the straits. Trumpets were sounded. Each galley was towing a transport ship so that the crossing might be made more easily. Nobody asked which ship should go first, but instead each of them landed as soon as they were able to. The knights came out of the transports, leaping into the sea up to their waists, fully armed, their helmets laced and their lances in their hands. The good archers, the good sergeants and the good crossbowmen did the same, each group going ashore as soon as they reached land.

[157] The Greeks made a great show of being ready to resist, but when the knights came to lower their lances the Greeks turned their backs and fled, abandoning the shore. Know that no one ever made such an audacious landing. Straightaway the sailors began opening the doors of the transports and bringing forward the gangplanks so that the horses could be led out. The knights then began to mount their horses and the battalions to form up in the designated order. [158] Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut rode ahead, leading the vanguard, and the other battalions followed behind, each riding out in their proper order. They went as far as the site where Emperor

Alexius had encamped, from where he had retreated towards Constantinople, leaving his tents and pavilions set up. Our men seized plentiful booty there.

[159] The consensus among our barons was that they should encamp by the port, next to the Tower of Galata. It was here that the chain that came across the harbour from Constantinople was fixed. You should know with certainty that anyone who wanted to enter the port of Constantinople had to get past that chain. Our barons saw clearly that if they did not take this tower and break the chain they would be in a dire, deadly situation. And so they set up camp that night next to the tower in the Jewish quarter, which is called Estanor and is a pleasant and prosperous neighbourhood.

[160] They kept a close watch all that night. The next day, at the hour of terce, the people inside the Tower of Galata attacked them and the inhabitants of Constantinople came in boats to assist them. Our men ran to arms. James of Avesnes and his company joined battle on foot, and you should know that he was charged at fiercely and was struck in the middle of his face with a lance. He was in danger of being killed but one of his knights, whose name was Nicholas of Jenlain, mounted his horse and protected his lord very well, so well that he was highly praised as a result. [161] The alarm was raised in the camp. Our men rushed from all directions and drove their opponents off vigorously so that many of them were captured or killed. A good number of the Greeks did not turn back towards the tower but instead made for the boats by which they had come, and more of them were drowned there, while a few escaped. Those who returned to the tower were so closely followed by the men from the army that they could not close the gate. Intense fighting resumed there at the gate and the tower was taken by force and the people inside captured. A good number were either killed or taken prisoner.

[162] Thus the fortress of Galata was taken and the port of Constantinople won by force. This was a great comfort to those in the army and they gave great thanks to Lord God for it, while the people inside the city were downcast. The following day the *nefs*, galleys, transports and other vessels were brought

inside the port, and the men of the army held a council to determine what they should do, whether to attack the city from the sea or by land. The Venetians were of the firm opinion that the scaling ladders should be raised on the *nefs* and that all assaults should be made from the sea. The French said that they did not know nearly as well as the Venetians how to make themselves useful on the sea, but that they would be of much greater assistance on land when they had their horses and arms. The conclusion of the meeting was that the Venetians would attack from the sea, and the barons and the rest of the army by land.

[163] They remained encamped for four days, and on the fifth¹ the entire force armed itself and the battalions rode out, in their designated order, passing above the port until they were directly opposite the palace of Blachernae. The fleet came through to the far end of the port, until they were level with the army. At the point the army had reached a river flows into the sea and it could not be crossed except by using a stone bridge. The Greeks had torn that bridge down, and the barons set the army to work throughout that day and night to repair it. By morning the bridge was restored and the battalions armed themselves; they rode out one after another, in their designated order, and arrived outside the city. None of its inhabitants came out against them, which was a great surprise since for each man in the army there were 200 in the city.

[164] The barons decided to set up camp between the palace of Blachernae and Bohemond's castle, which was an abbey² encircled by walls. The tents and pavilions were erected, revealing an awesome prospect; along the three-league length of the landward walls of Constantinople, the entire army was only able to lay siege to one gate. The Venetians were at sea in the *nefs* and other vessels, setting up the scaling ladders, mangonels and petraeries; their assault was very well organized. And the barons, for their part, made similar preparations on land, setting up petraeries and mangonels.

[165] Know that the army was never at peace, for there was no hour of day or night at which there was not an armed battalion outside the gate to keep watch over the engines and

defend against sorties. But in spite of this the Greeks still came out of that gate and others to harass them, keeping the army so hard pressed that the whole force was called to arms six or seven times a day. No one could go in search of food more than four crossbow-shots away from the camp, and supplies were very low. They had a little flour and bacon, but no fresh meat except from the horses that were killed. You should know that the food available throughout the camp only amounted to a three-week supply. This was a most perilous situation, since never, in any city, had so many people been besieged by so few.

[166] A very good scheme was settled upon. They surrounded the whole camp with solid timbers, strong barriers and sturdy palisades, and this made their position much stronger and more secure. The Greeks made such frequent sorties against the camp that they allowed our men no rest, although the forces from the camp drove them back very fiercely and the Greeks suffered losses every time they ventured out.

[167] One day the Burgundians were on guard when the Greeks made a sortie against the camp. A strong force of their best men came out of the city and the Burgundians made a counter-attack, repulsing them vigorously but approaching so close to the gate that people inside the city threw large pieces of stone at them. One of the finest of the Greeks from Constantinople, who was called Constantine Lascaris,³ was captured there by Walter of Neuilly, who took him prisoner while the Greek was still mounted on his horse. In the same incident William of Champlirte had his arm broken by a stone, which was a great pity since he was very brave and very worthy.

[168] I cannot begin to recount to you all the blows, wounds and deaths suffered there. But before the fighting had ceased a knight from the retinue of Henry, Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut's brother, joined the fray. He was called Eustace of le Marchais, and his only armour was a gambeson, an iron cap and a shield at his neck. He acquitted himself very well as he drove the enemy off, and received high praise as a result. There were few days on which no sortie was made, but I cannot tell you about all of them. Our men were so hard pressed that no one could sleep or rest or eat without being armed.

[169] Another sortie was made from a gate on higher ground. The Greeks once again suffered substantial losses, but a knight was killed there whose name was William of Gy. Matthew of Waincourt conducted himself very well on that occasion, although he lost his horse when it was killed at the gate's drawbridge, and many of those who took part in this skirmish performed impressively. At the gate below the palace of Blachernae, where the Greeks ventured out most frequently, Peter of Bracieux won more praise than anyone else since he was encamped the closest to it and therefore most often arrived on the scene.

[170] These dangers and labours lasted nearly ten days, until one Thursday morning⁴ all was ready for the assault, including the scaling ladders. The Venetians too had all in order at sea. It was decided that during the attack three of the seven battalions should stay outside the camp to guard it while the other four would undertake the assault. Marquis Boniface of Montferrat defended the camp from the side towards the fields, along with the Champenois battalion (led by Matthew of Montmorency) and the Burgundians. Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut was going to lead the attack with his men, aided by his brother Henry, Count Louis of Blois and Chartres, Count Hugh of Saint-Pol, and those in their service.

[171] They set two scaling ladders against a barbican near the sea. The walls were heavily defended by English and Danish men,⁵ and the assault was good and strong and hard. Two knights and two sergeants, by their own sheer force, climbed the scaling ladders and captured the wall from their opponents. At least fifteen men climbed up on to the wall after them to fight hand-to-hand with battle-axes and swords. The men inside the barbican fought back, driving our forces off fiercely and capturing two of our men. These prisoners were taken before Emperor Alexius, which pleased him greatly. And so the assault by the French came to a halt, with a good number of men wounded and injured; the barons were greatly distressed.

[172] Meanwhile the doge of Venice had not neglected his duty; he had drawn his *nefs* and transports and other vessels into a single line, which extended for a good three crossbow-shots'

length. This line began to approach the shore beneath the walls and towers. You would have seen mangonels taking shots from the *nefs* and transports, while crossbow bolts were loosed and bows fired quickly and repeatedly as those inside the city vigorously defended the walls and towers. The scaling ladders on the *nefs* were brought against the walls so forcefully that in several places there were clashes of swords and spears. The din was so great that it seemed as if land and sea quaked. And you should know that the galleys did not dare to land.

[173] Now you will hear of a wondrous and brave feat: the doge of Venice — who was an old man and could not see a thing — was in the prow of his galley, fully armed and with the banner of Saint Mark before him. He called out to his men that they should put him ashore: if they refused he would punish them harshly. And so they brought the galley to land and themselves leapt forth, taking the banner of Saint Mark ashore ahead of the doge. [174] When the Venetians saw that the banner of Saint Mark had landed and that their lord's galley had reached land before them, each of them felt himself ashamed and they all went ashore. Those in the transports leapt out as and when each saw his chance and made their way to land. Then you would have seen an astounding assault. Geoffrey of Villehardouin, the marshal of Champagne, who composed this work, is your witness that more than forty people told him honestly that they saw the banner of Saint Mark of Venice on one of the towers, although no one knew who had carried it there.

[175] And now you will hear of a prodigious miracle; those inside the walls fled, abandoning them as our men entered the city as and when each saw his chance. They captured twenty-five of the towers and set their own men to defend them. The doge called for a boat to send messengers to the barons of the army to let them know that the Venetians had taken twenty-five towers and were sure they could never be recaptured. The barons were so overjoyed that they could not believe this to be true. In the meantime the Venetians began to send some of the warhorses and palfreys they had captured in the city by boat to the camp.

[176] When Emperor Alexius saw that the Venetians had

thus entered the city, he began to send his own men out against them in great numbers. And when the Venetians saw that they would not be able to hold out against them, they set fires between themselves and the Greeks. The wind was blowing from where our men were positioned, and the fires began to grow to such a size that the Greeks could not see our men, who then retreated to the towers they had taken and captured.

[177] At that point Emperor Alexius of Constantinople, together with his forces, left the city through other gates — ones at least a league away from our camp. So many people were coming out that it seemed as if the whole world was on the move. The emperor organized his battalions out in the countryside and then rode on towards our camp. When our French forces saw them they ran to arms from all directions. On that day Henry, the brother of Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut, was guarding the siege engines along with Matthew of Walincourt, Baldwin of Beauvoir and the men of their retinues. Emperor Alexius had directed a large body of men to come out from the city through three of its gates to face them while he attacked the camp from the other side.

[178] Then the six French battalions left the camp in their designated order and lined up in front of the palisade. Each knight had his sergeants and squires on foot behind his horse's hindquarters, while the archers and crossbowmen were in front of them. One group was formed of knights on foot, of whom there were fully 200; these were men who no longer had any horses. They calmly held this order in front of the palisades, which made very great sense since, were they to have gone out into the countryside to engage with the enemy they would have encountered such a vast number that our whole force would have been engulfed by them.

[179] It appeared as if the entire plain was covered with enemy battalions. They approached slowly, keeping to their formation. This certainly seemed a perilous situation, since our men had only six battalions while the Greeks had a good sixty of them, all of which were larger than any one of ours. But our forces were lined up in such a way that no one could come at them except from the front. Emperor Alexius advanced far

enough that each side could fire at the other, and when the doge of Venice learned of this he had his men retreat from and abandon the towers they had conquered, declaring that he wished to live or die with the pilgrims. And so they made their way by boat to the camp, the doge himself coming ashore first, followed by as many men as he had been able to bring with him.

[180] The pilgrims' and Greeks' battalions were face to face for a long while, since the Greeks did not dare to come and attack their position and the pilgrims refused to move away from the palisade. When Emperor Alexius saw this he began to withdraw his forces, and once they had regrouped he had them retreat. Seeing this, the pilgrim army began to ride out slowly towards them, and the Greek battalions in turn set off in retreat to a palace called the Philopatration.

[181] Know that God has never delivered any people from such great danger as he did the army that day. Know moreover that there was no man present so brave that he did not feel very glad about this. Thus they left off battle that day; God's will was that nothing more should transpire. Emperor Alexius withdrew into the city while the men of the army returned to their lodgings and removed their armour, feeling very weary and overwrought. They ate and drank little, for their supplies were very low.

[182] Now heed the miracles of Our Lord, all of which are beautiful, wherever he chooses to perform them. That very night Emperor Alexius of Constantinople took what he could carry of his treasure and set off with those of his followers who wished to leave; thus they fled, abandoning the city. The people of the city were left behind in amazement. They made their way to the prison where Emperor Isaac – who had had his eyes put out – was being held. They dressed him in the imperial robes and brought him to the great palace of Blachernae, where they seated him in the high throne and promised him obedience as their lord. Then, with advice from Emperor Isaac, they chose messengers and sent them to the army to inform the emperor's son and the barons that Emperor Alexius had fled and Isaac was restored as emperor. [183] When the young prince heard this he called for Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, who in turn

summoned the barons throughout the camp. Once they had gathered in Emperor Isaac's son's pavilion, he passed this news on to them. It is impossible to describe their joy on hearing this, for never in the world was there any greater. Our Lord received much pious praise from everyone, for he had come to their aid so soon, and had lifted them up from so lowly a position to set them on high. And on this account one can rightly say: 'He whom God wishes to help, no man may harm.'

[184] Soon day began to break, and the army started its preparations. Everyone in the camp armed himself since they did not in the least trust the Greeks. But messengers began to venture out of the city, one by one or in pairs, bringing the same news. The decision made by the barons and counts and by the doge of Venice was that they should send envoys into the city to find out how matters stood there and, if what they had been told was true, to ask the father to confirm the same terms they had agreed with his son. Otherwise they would not let his son enter the city at all. The envoys were chosen. One was Matthew of Montmorency and Geoffrey, marshal of Champagne, was another, along with two Venetians sent on behalf of the doge.

[185] The envoys were accompanied as far as the gate; it was opened for them and they got down from their horses. The Greeks had placed Englishmen and Danes bearing battle-axes along the route from the gate as far the palace of Blachernae. There the envoys found Emperor Isaac, so richly attired that one would seek in vain for a man more lavishly dressed. The empress, his wife, was alongside him – a most beautiful woman who was the sister of the king of Hungary.⁶ There were so many other high-ranking men and women present that one could barely turn round, and the ladies were all as richly dressed as could be. And all those who had been opposed to the emperor the previous day were now subject to his will.

[186] The envoys came before Emperor Isaac who, along with everyone else, showed them great honour. He was told by them that they wanted to talk to him privately, on behalf of his son and the barons of the army. The emperor rose to his feet and went into a side chamber, taking with him only the empress,

his chancellor, his translator and the four envoys. With the agreement of the other envoys Geoffrey of Villehardouin, marshal of Champagne, announced their business, saying to Emperor Isaac: [187] 'My lord, you can see what service we have performed for your son and how well we have honoured our agreement with him. But he may not enter this city until he has given us a guarantee that he will keep his promises to us. He asks you, as his son, to confirm the agreement with us on the same terms and in the same manner as he has done.' 'What are the terms of this agreement?' asked the emperor. And the envoy replied, 'I will tell you what they are. [188] He promised in the first instance to place the entire empire of Romania in obedience to Rome, from which it has formerly been cut off. Then, to give 200,000 marks of silver to the army along with a year's supply of provisions for both the higher and lower ranks. To lead 10,000 men in his own ships and to support them at his own expense for one year, and to maintain 500 knights for the defence of the land overseas for the rest of his life. Such is the agreement your son has with us. He has confirmed it with sworn oaths and sealed charters, with the support of King Philip of Germany, your daughter's husband. It is our wish that you should confirm it too.'

[189] 'In truth,' said the emperor, 'this agreement is a most burdensome one, and I do not see quite how it can be fulfilled. However, you have done both my son and myself such service that if you had been granted the whole empire you would have well deserved it.' Many different opinions were stated and restated there. But the outcome was that the father confirmed the terms of the agreement just as the son had done, with sworn oaths and with charters bearing golden seals. One charter was handed to the envoys, who then took their leave of Emperor Isaac and returned to the camp, where they told the barons that they had succeeded in their mission.

[190] The barons then mounted their horses and led the young prince with great joy into the city, to his father. The Greeks opened the gate to him and welcomed him with very great rejoicing and very great celebration. Father and son were both highly delighted, since they had not seen each other for a

long time and because with God's help above all, but also with help from the pilgrims, they had been lifted out of such great poverty and distress to such an exalted position. And so there was great rejoicing inside Constantinople and among the pilgrims in their camp on account of the honour and victory God had granted them.

[191] The next day the emperor and his son asked the counts and barons whether they would, please God, go and set up camp on the other side of the port, near Estanor. This was because there would be the risk of clashes between them and the Greeks if they were to take up residence in the city, and it might even lead to the city's destruction. The barons said they had already served Prince Alexius in so many ways that they would not now refuse what he and his father requested of them. And so they went to set up camp on the other side of the water, where they stayed peacefully and quietly, and were plentifully supplied with good food.

[192] Now you may know that many people from the army went to look at Constantinople,⁷ its sumptuous palaces, its many impressive churches and its great riches, of which no other city ever had as many. It is impossible even to begin to describe all the saints' relics since there were as many in the city at that time as there were in the rest of the world put together. The Greeks and the French thus came into close contact in all areas of life, in trade and other concerns.

[193] By common agreement between the Franks and the Greeks it was settled that the new emperor would be crowned on the feast of Saint Peter, at the beginning of August.⁸ Thus it was planned, and so it was done. He was crowned most nobly and most honourably, as was customary for Greek emperors. Not long afterwards he began to pay the money he owed to the army, which was shared out among its members to reimburse the fee for his passage each man had paid at Venice.

CHAPTER 6

Alliances Renewed and Abandoned

(September 1203—March 1204)

[194] The new emperor often went to visit the barons in the camp and showed them great honour, as much as he was able to do. And so he should have done, since they had served him very well. One day he came to speak to the barons privately in the lodgings of Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut. The doge of Venice and the most important barons had been summoned there secretly, and the emperor set forth his business, saying, 'My lords, I am emperor by God's grace and by yours, and you have performed for me the highest service any people have ever done for a Christian man. But you should know that many people make a show of kindness towards me who do not care for me at all, and the Greeks have great contempt for the fact that I came into my inheritance through your efforts. [195] The time is drawing near for your departure, and the pact between you and the Venetians only lasts until the feast of Saint Michael.' I cannot fulfil my commitments to you in so short a period. You should know then, if you will allow me to say so, that the Greeks hate me on account of you. If you leave I will lose this land and they will put me to death. Alternatively, you could do this one thing I ask of you: stay until March, and in return I will extend the lease of your fleet until the feast of Saint Michael next year, and pay the Venetians for it. I will also meet your material needs until Easter. During this time I will bring my lands to heel and will not be in danger of losing them again. In this way my obligations towards you may be fulfilled, since I will have received the money due to me from all my lands. I will also have prepared a fleet that I might lead alongside you or send with you, as I have pledged to do.

And then you will have all summer, from beginning to end, to make war.'

[196] The barons said they would discuss this proposal in private. They well understood that what he said was true and that his plan represented the best hope for both him and them. They told him that they could do nothing without the agreement of the whole army, and that they would discuss the matter with their colleagues and report back to him with their findings. Emperor Alexius then left them to go back to Constantinople, while the barons stayed in the camp and called a conference for the following day to which all the barons and leaders of the army were summoned, along with the majority of the knights. At this meeting the full proposal was set forth, just as the emperor had presented it to them.

[197] There was very great discord within the army that came, as it had on many occasions, from those who wanted the army to disband; it seemed to them that the expedition was going on too long. The same party that had encouraged dissent at Corfu called on their colleagues to keep their oaths, saying, 'Provide us with ships as you swore to us you would. We want to go to Syria.'

[198] Others called on them, pleading, and said, 'Sirs, for God's sake let us not lose the honour God has given us. If we leave for Syria now we will arrive at the start of winter and it will be impossible for us to fight, with the result that Our Lord's work will remain undone. But if we wait until March we will leave this emperor in a good position and set off rich in money and provisions. Then we can make for Syria and launch our attack on the land of Egypt. Our fleet will stay with us until the feast of Saint Michael, and from then until Easter, since the Venetians won't be able to leave us during winter. In this way the land overseas might be conquered.'

[199] Right and wrong were of no concern to those who wanted to see the army disband, only that the force should break up. But those who wanted to keep the army together made their case so effectively that, with God's help, the matter was brought to the end in such a way that the Venetians swore an oath to continue to provide the fleet for a year from the feast

of Saint Michael. Emperor Alexius paid them enough to go ahead with this agreement. For their part, the pilgrims swore to continue their association with the Venetians on the existing terms until the same date. Thus concord and peace were brought to the army.

[200] A great misfortune then befell it. Matthew of Montmorency, who was one of the best knights from the kingdom of France and one of the most highly valued and deeply loved, died. This was a great sorrow and a great loss, one of the most profound to strike the army through the death of one man. He was buried in a church dedicated to my lord Saint John of the Hospital of Jerusalem.

[201] Afterwards, with the agreement of the Greeks and the French, Emperor Alexius left Constantinople with a very large body of men to secure the empire and subject it to his authority. Most of the barons went with him, the others staying to guard the camp. Marquis Boniface of Montferrat accompanied him, as did Count Hugh of Saint-Pol, Henry the brother of Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut, James of Avesnes, William of Champlitte, Hugh of Coligny, and a good number of other people this book will not mention. Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut stayed in the camp, along with Count Louis of Blois and Chartres and the majority of the pilgrims.

[202] Know that in the course of the emperor's expedition all the Greeks, from both sides of the Straits of Saint George, subjected themselves to him, to his will and to his authority, offering him loyalty and homage as their lord. The only exception was Johanitsa, the king of Vlachia and Bulgaria.² This Johanitsa was a Vlach who had rebelled against Emperor Alexius's father and uncle and made war on them for twenty years, conquering so much land from them that he made himself a powerful king. You should know that he had captured nearly half of the empire's territory on the western side of the Straits of Saint George. This man did not subject himself to the emperor's authority or mercy.

[203] While Emperor Alexius was absent on campaign, a great misfortune struck Constantinople. A large brawl broke out between the Greeks and the Latin residents of the city, of

which there were a large number. I do not know which group wickedly set fire to the city, but the blaze was so widespread and intense that no one could put it out or bring it under control. When they saw this the barons of the army, who were encamped on the other side of the port, were deeply saddened and felt great pity as they watched those noble churches and fine palaces crumble and fall, and the broad streets of merchants' shops engulfed by flames. But there was nothing more they could do. [204] Fire seized the area towards the harbour, and spread out from there across the most densely populated part of the city as far as the sea on the other side, level with the church of Saint Sophia. The fire lasted for a week, during which time no one was able to extinguish it and the front along which it burned extended fully half a league. No one could tell you the damage it caused in terms of the money and property lost, nor in terms of the lives of men, women and children, many of whom burned to death.

[205] None of the Latins who had been resident inside Constantinople, no matter where they came from, dared stay in the city any longer. And so they gathered up their wives and children and whatever they had been able to bring out of the fire and they boarded boats and ships to cross the harbour to where the pilgrims were. The numbers were not triflings; there were at least 15,000 people of both higher and lower condition who, in the wake of their crossing, would prove to be of great use to the pilgrims. In this way the Franks and the Greeks parted ways, and were not nearly as friendly as they had been before. No one knew who should be blamed for this, which weighed heavy on the minds of people on both sides.

[206] Around that time something happened that was most distressing to the barons and the people of the army. The abbot of Loos, who was a holy man and a *preudomme*, and wished only good things for the army, died. He had been a monk of the Cistercian order.

[207] Emperor Alexius remained absent on his expedition for a very long time; he returned to Constantinople on the feast of Saint Martin.³ There was great rejoicing at the arrival of this force; the Greeks and the women from Constantinople rode

out in long cavalcades to meet their friends and the pilgrims went to greet theirs, which brought them all very great joy. And so the emperor made his way back inside Constantinople, to the palace of Blachernae, while the marquis of Montferrat and the other barons returned to be with the pilgrims.

[208] Having settled his affairs very effectively the emperor believed he was no longer dependent on the barons and began to act haughtily towards them and the people who had done him such good. He no longer came to see them in their camp as he had done before. The barons sent messengers to him, begging him to pay them their money as had been agreed. He put them off with one delay after another. He made meagre, paltry payments from time to time but in the end they dwindled to nothing.

[209] Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, who had done him greater service and was on better terms with him than the other barons, went to visit him frequently. He reproached him for his unjust treatment of them and reminded him of the great service they had given him – never had such great service been performed for any man. But he just put the barons off and failed to keep any of his promises to them; before long they realized and understood clearly that all his intentions were wicked.

[210] The barons of the army and the doge of Venice held a council. They said they recognized that this man would not uphold any of their agreements and that he never told them the truth. They should send trustworthy envoys to him to demand his fulfilment of their treaty and to reprove him for his treatment of them. If he was willing to do as he ought, the envoys should accept his offer; if he was unwilling they should defy him on behalf of the barons and the doge and assure him that they would recover what was due to them by whatever means necessary.

[211] Conon of Béthune, Geoffrey of Villehardouin, the marshal of Champagne, and Milton le Bréban of Provins were chosen by the barons to deliver this message, and the doge of Venice sent three high-ranking men from his council. And so the envoys mounted their horses, their swords set at their sides, and rode out together to the palace of Blachernae. And you

should know that they were going in great danger and at great risk because of the Greeks' treachery. [212] They dismounted at the gates and entered the palace, where they found Emperor Alexius and his father Emperor Isaac seated in two thrones, side by side. Next to them sat the empress. She was the father's wife and the son's stepmother; she was the king of Hungary's sister and was a beautiful and good woman. There were a large number of high-ranking men and women present, so that this court certainly appeared to be that of a powerful prince.

[213] With the agreement of the other envoys, Conon of Béthune, who was most wise and well-spoken, set forth their business: 'My lord, we have come to you on behalf of the barons of the army and the doge of Venice. Know that you should be mindful of the service they have performed for you, which everyone knows about and which is clear for all to see. You swore, both you and your father, that you would uphold your agreement with them and they have your charters to prove it. But you have not fulfilled the terms nearly as well as you should. [214] They have called on you to do so numerous times, and we call on you on their behalf in the presence of your own barons, to satisfy the terms of the agreement in place between you and them. If you do so they will be very pleased. If you do not do so you should know that from this time forward they will not regard you as their lord or as their friend. Instead they will recover what is owed to them by whatever means necessary. They inform you that they will do no harm to you or to anyone else until they have delivered a statement of defiance; they have never acted deceitfully and it would be against the custom of their country to do so. Now, you have heard our message and will make whatever decision you please.'

[215] The Greeks found this challenge most astounding and most shocking. They said that no one had ever been so bold as to dare defy the emperor of Constantinople in his own hall. Emperor Alexius and the other Greeks looked on the envoys with faces full of ill will, faces that on many earlier occasions had shown such kindness.

[216] There was a great uproar in the hall. The envoys turned on their heels and made for the gate, where they mounted their

horses. They all felt very glad to have passed through the gate, which is not surprising as they had escaped from a very dangerous situation in which they could very easily have all been killed or captured. They returned to the camp and told the barons how they had got on. And so the war began; each side striking the other as and when they could, both on land and at sea. The Franks and Greeks clashed in many places but never – thank God – did they meet in battle without the Greeks suffering heavier losses than the Franks. The war dragged on a long time, into the depths of winter.

[217] And then the Greeks came up with a grand scheme. They took seventeen large ships and filled them all with timbers, tinder, tow, barrels and pitch, and waited until the wind was blowing very hard from their side of the water. And then one night at midnight they set fire to the ships and unfurled their sails to the wind. The flames burned so high that it seemed as if the whole world was on fire. Then the ships were sent in the direction of the pilgrims' fleet. The alarm was raised in the camp and men rushed to arms from all directions. The Venetians ran to their ships, as did everyone else who had vessels there, and began intensive efforts to rescue them.

[218] Geoffrey, the marshal of Champagne, who dictated this work, is your faithful witness that no people ever defended themselves more effectively at sea than did those Venetians. They leapt into galleys and into barges and *nefs*, took hold of the burning vessels using grappling irons and by sheer force dragged them out of their harbour towards the enemy; they released the boats into the current and sent them, ablaze, down the straits. So many Greeks had come to the shoreline that they were endless and innumerable, and their cries were so loud that it seemed as if land and sea were quaking. They boarded barges and lifeboats and took shots at our men who were fighting the fire, some of whom were wounded.

[219] As soon as they heard the alarm the knights in the camp armed themselves and went out into the fields in their battalions one after the other, their order determined by where they were lodged in the camp. They feared the Greeks might come and attack them from the countryside.

[220] They endured this labour and distress until day had fully broken. But with God's help our people lost nothing, except one Pisan ship full of merchandise which was consumed by the fire. They would have faced very grave danger had their fleet burned that night; they would have lost everything and been unable to leave by land or sea. This was the reward Emperor Alexius wished to give for their service to him.

[221] The Greeks, who were thus embroiled with the Franks, saw there was no longer any possibility of peace. Behind closed doors, some of them came to the conclusion they should betray the emperor. One of them was better regarded by Emperor Alexius than any of the others, and had done more to encourage him into conflict with the Franks. This Greek was called Mourtzouphlus.⁴

[222] On the advice and with the agreement of the others, the following plan was put into action. One night at midnight, while Emperor Alexius was sleeping, Mourtzouphlus (who had himself been appointed to guard him) and his companions seized the emperor in his bed and threw him into a prison cell. With the assistance and approval of his fellow Greeks, Mourtzouphlus donned the scarlet boots⁵ and made himself emperor; he was later crowned at Saint Sophia. Now listen and hear if ever any betrayal so wicked was carried out by any people.

[223] When Emperor Isaac heard that his son had been captured and Mourtzouphlus crowned, he was very afraid. He was seized by an illness but it did not last very long, and he died. Emperor Mourtzouphlus had the imprisoned son poisoned two or three times, but it was not God's will that he should die. Then Mourtzouphlus murdered him by strangulation, and when this deed had been done he had word spread everywhere that Alexius had died naturally. Mourtzouphlus had him buried with imperial honours and made a great show of grief.

[224] But murder will out; both the Greeks and the French soon knew without doubt that the murder had been committed as you have just heard it described. The barons of the army and the doge of Venice held a conference at which the bishops and the clergy were present. All the clergy, including those with

a mandate from the pope, agreed with the assessment presented to the barons and pilgrims; anyone who committed such a murder had no right to possess lands, and all those who had consented to the crime were complicit in it. And, above and beyond all this, the Greeks had withdrawn from obedience to Rome.

[225] 'We therefore tell you,' said the clergy, 'that this battle is right and just. If you have the right intention of conquering this land and placing it in obedience to Rome, all those of you who die here having made your confession will receive the same indulgence the pope has granted you.'⁶ You should know that this was a great comfort to the barons and pilgrims.

[226] The war between the Franks and the Greeks was fierce; there were no lulls in the fighting, instead it steadily grew and intensified. Few were the days without a clash either on land or at sea. Henry, Count Baldwin of Flanders' brother, led one raid in which most of the best men in the army took part. James of Avesnes went with him, as did Baldwin of Beauvoir, Odo the Champenois of Champlitte and his brother William, and the men from their countries. They set out from the camp one evening, around vespers, and rode through the night. Late the next morning they came to a pleasant town called Philia, captured it and seized livestock, prisoners, clothing and food as booty, which they sent in boats down the Straits of Saint George to the camp. (This town is situated on the Russian Sea.)⁷

[227] They stayed in this town for two days, enjoying its plentiful supplies. On the third day they set out with all their livestock and booty and rode back towards the camp. Emperor Mourtzouphlus had received word that this group had left the camp, and he set out from Constantinople by night with a large number of his men. They took up position to ambush the returning raiders, and spotted them making their way with all their livestock and their booty. The Greeks watched the battalions pass, one after another, until the rearguard appeared. This was formed by Henry, Count Baldwin of Flanders' brother, and his men. Emperor Mourtzouphlus charged at them as they entered a wood. They turned to face him and the two sides clashed very fiercely.

[228] With God's help Emperor Mourtzouphlus was defeated and was himself very nearly taken prisoner. He lost his imperial banner and an icon that had been carried before him. He and the other Greeks set great store by this icon, which bore an image of Our Lady. He also lost as many as twenty of the best knights he had. Emperor Mourtzouphlus was routed as you have heard, but intense fighting continued between him and the Franks. Much of winter had already passed; it was now around Candlemas⁸ and Lent was approaching.

[229] Now we will leave the men before Constantinople and tell you instead about those men who had gone to other ports than Venice, and those with the Flemish fleet that had spent the winter at Marseilles before all its ships crossed to Syria in the summer. There were so many of them that they far outnumbered those outside Constantinople. Now you will hear what harm was done when these men did not join that force; had they done so Christendom would have been forever exalted. But because of their sins God did not wish this to happen. Some of them died as a result of the sickly climate in Syria and others went back to their own countries. None of them ever achieved anything noteworthy or useful in the lands they visited.

[230] One company of very good men set out to go to Antioch, to join Bohemond, prince of Antioch and count of Tripoli, who was at war with King Leon, the ruler of the Armenians.⁹ This company was on its way to fight as mercenaries for the prince. The Turks in that region knew this and laid an ambush along the route they had to take. They charged and did battle with the Franks, routing them so completely that not one of them escaped; they were all killed or captured.

[231] Villain of Nully, one of the best knights in the world, was killed there as were Giles of Trazegnies and many others. Bernard of Moreuil was taken prisoner along with Renaud of Dampierre, John of Villers and the blameless William of Nully. You should know that none of the eighty knights that had been in that company escaped; they were all killed or captured. And this book is your faithful witness that no man abandoned the army at Venice without some hurt or shame befalling him. This is why he is but wise who keeps to the better path.

CHAPTER 7

The Second Siege of Constantinople

(April 1204)

[232] Now we will leave these men behind and speak of those still outside Constantinople, who had most carefully prepared their siege engines and set up their petraries and mangonels on board the *nefs* and transports, along with every other kind of machine useful in capturing a city. Scaling ladders had been attached to the *nefs*' yards to reach astonishing heights.

[233] Seeing this the Greeks began to strengthen the city's fortifications on the opposite side of the straits. Constantinople was already heavily defended with high walls and tall towers, but there were no towers so tall that they did not decide to raise them further by constructing two or three more levels out of wood; never was a city so well fortified. And so both the Greeks and the Franks were hard at work throughout most of Lent.

[234] The men of the army held a conference to decide how they should proceed. There was lively debate, back and forth, but the conclusion of the meeting was that if God granted them entry into the city by force, all the booty seized should be gathered together and then shared out among the entire force, as was fitting. And if they did take control of the city, six Frenchmen and six Venetians would be chosen who would swear on relics that they would elect as emperor the man they believed would be of greatest benefit to that land. The man made emperor as a result of this election would receive one-quarter of all their conquests both inside and outside the city, and would have the palaces of Bucoleon and Blachernae. The remaining three-quarters of their conquests would be divided equally, half going to the Venetians and half to the people of the army. Twelve of the wisest men from the pilgrim army and

twelve from among the Venetians would be chosen who would then distribute fiefs and possessions among the men, determining what service each of them owed to the emperor.

[235] This arrangement was confirmed and sealed with sworn oaths by both the French and the Venetians. It was agreed that in a year's time, at the end of March, anyone who wished to leave could do so. Those who stayed in that country would be retained in the emperor's service under terms to be determined when the time came. In this way the pact was set out and confirmed. All those who did not uphold it would be excommunicated.

[236] The fleet was very well prepared and armed, and all the pilgrims' provisions were loaded on board. On the Thursday after mid-Lent everyone boarded the ships and the horses were led into the transports. Each battalion had its own vessels which were all ranged side-by-side, *nefs* dispersed among the galleys and transports. This was a great marvel to behold; and this book bears faithful witness that the attacking forces, arranged in this way, extended over fully half a French league.

[237] On Friday morning the *nefs* and galleys and other vessels drew near the city in due order and the assault began, very strong and very hard. In many places men came ashore and went as far as the walls, and in many other places the ladders on board the *nefs* approached so close that the men on the walls and towers and the men on the ladders exchanged spear-blows hand-to-hand. The assault went on in this way, very hard, very strong and very fierce, in more than a hundred places until it was nearly the hour of none. [238] But, because of our sins, the pilgrims were repulsed in this attack. Those who had come ashore from the galleys and transport ships were driven back by force. Know that our army's losses that day were greater than the Greeks', who were heartened as a result. There were some who withdrew from the assault with their ships, and others who stayed at anchor so close to the city that they fired with petraries and mangonels one against the other.²

[239] In the evening the men of the army and the doge of Venice held a meeting, and they gathered in a church on the other side of the straits, the side where they had set up camp.

Many opinions were exchanged there, and the men of the army were greatly dismayed because of their misfortune that day. Many of them advised that they should attack from the other side of the city, the side that was not so well fortified. The Venetians, who knew more about the sea, said that if they went to that side the water's current would carry them down the straits and they would not be able to stop their ships. And know that there were some who wished that the current or the wind would take the ships down the straits – they did not care where they were taken, as long as they might leave that land and be on their way. This was no wonder, for they were in great peril.

[240] Much was said, back and forth, but the outcome of the discussion was that they would re-equip themselves the next day, which was Saturday, and all day on Sunday, and then on Monday they would attack. They would bind together, two-by-two, the *nefs* equipped with ladders, and in this way they would attack a single tower with two ships. They had seen that day that if only one ship attacked a tower each ship was overwhelmed, as the men on the tower outnumbered the men on the ladders. For this reason it seemed a sound proposal that two ladders would be more of a threat to a tower than one. This was done as had been agreed, and thus they waited out Saturday and Sunday.

[241] Emperor Mourtzouphlus had come and set up camp with all his forces in an area in front of our point of attack, and had pitched his red tents. Matters continued thus until Monday morning when the men in the *nefs*, transports and galleys were armed. The people of the city feared them less than they had done at first, and they were in such good spirits that all one could see along the walls and towers was people. Then the assault started, fierce and awesome, and each of the vessels attacked straight ahead. The cries from the battle were so great that it seemed that the earth was quaking.

[242] The assault went on in this way for some time, until Our Lord raised a wind known as Boreas,³ which drove the *nefs* and other vessels further on to the shore than before. Two *nefs* which had been bound together, one of which was called

the *Pilgrim* and the other the *Paradise*, came before a tower, one on one side and the other on the other side – as God and the winds directed them – so that the *Pilgrim*'s ladder landed on the tower. Straightaway a Venetian and a French knight called Andrew Dureboise entered the tower, and others entered after them. Those who had held the tower lost heart and fled.

[243] When the knights in the transports saw this, they came ashore and raised ladders against the face of the wall. They climbed up the wall by force and captured at least four of the towers. Men began to leap from the *nefs* and transports and galleys as and when each saw his chance. They broke through at least three of the gates and entered inside. They began to lead the horses out of the transports, and the knights mounted them and rode straight to Emperor Mourtzouphlus's camp. He had ranged his battalions in front of his tents, but when they saw the mounted knights coming, they lost heart and fled, and the emperor took flight through the streets to the palace of Bucoleon.

[244] Then you might have seen Greeks being struck down, and horses and palfreys seized along with he-mules, she-mules and other booty. There were so many dead and wounded that they were endless and innumerable. Many of the great men of Greece turned and fled towards the gate of Blachernae. The hour of vespers had already passed, and the men of the army were wearied by battle and killing. They began to gather in a great square inside Constantinople. Since they scarcely believed they could bring the city – with its mighty churches and strong palaces and all the people it held – under their control within a month, it was agreed they should camp near to the walls and towers that they had already captured. This was done as had been agreed.

[245] And so they set up camp outside the walls and outside the towers, close to their ships. Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut lodged in Emperor Mourtzouphlus's red tents, which he had abandoned still pitched, and Henry, the count's brother, camped outside the palace of Blachernae. Marquis Boniface of Montferrat and his company camped near the most built-up part of the city. And so the army was encamped as you have

heard, Constantinople having been taken on the Monday before Palm Sunday.⁴ Count Louis of Blois and Chartres had suffered from a quartan fever throughout the winter and could not bear arms. You should know that this was a great loss to the men of the army, for he was a very good knight but he was bed-ridden in one of the transports.

[246] Thus the men of the army, who were very tired, rested that night. But Emperor Mourtzouphlus did not rest; instead he gathered all his men, saying he would go and attack the Franks. But he did not do as he said; rather he rode out along other streets, as far away as he could from the men of the army, and came to a gate known as the Golden Gate. Through this he fled and abandoned the city, and those who were able to do so fled after him. The men of the army knew nothing of all this.

[247] During the night, near to Marquis Boniface of Montferrat's camp, certain men – I'm not sure who – set a fire between themselves and the Greeks, fearing that the Greeks might attack them. The city began to catch fire and burned very fiercely. It burned all that night and the next day until vespers. This was the third fire in Constantinople since the Franks arrived in that country, and more houses were burned than there are in the three largest cities in the kingdom of France.

[248] That night passed and day came. It was Tuesday morning. Everyone in the camp, both knights and sergeants, armed himself and each man joined his own battalion. They left their quarters thinking that they would encounter a greater battle than they had yet fought, since they did not know that the emperor had fled that very day. They found no one to oppose them.

[249] The marquis of Montferrat rode out along the shore, straight towards the Bucoleon. When he arrived there the palace was given up to him on the condition that the lives of those inside would be spared. There they found many of the most noble women in the world, who had fled to the palace: the sister of the king of France, the former empress, and the sister of the king of Hungary, another former empress,⁵ and many other noble women. It is impossible to describe the treasures

there were in that palace, for there were so many that they were endless and innumerable.

[250] Just as this palace was given up to Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, so the palace of Blachernae was given up to Henry, brother of Count Baldwin of Flanders, on condition that the lives of those inside would be spared. There too were found treasures so very great that there were no fewer than in the Bucoleon. Each man garrisoned the castle that had been given up to him with his own men and had the treasure guarded. The other men had scattered throughout the city and seized much booty, and the spoils were so great that no one could tell you how much it amounted to in gold, silver, tableware, precious stones, samite, silk cloth, garments of vair, grey fur and ermine, and all the fine things that were ever found on Earth. And Geoffrey of Villehardouin, marshal of Champagne, bears faithful witness in accordance with his certain knowledge, that no such spoils were won in any city since the creation of the world.

[251] Each man chose lodgings that pleased him, and there were plenty to go round. And so the army of pilgrims and Venetians established their quarters. There was great rejoicing at the honour and victory that God had granted them, for those who had been in poverty were now in wealth and luxury. Thus they celebrated Palm Sunday and the following Easter Sunday⁶ in God-given honour and joy. And they certainly should have praised Our Lord, since they had no more than 20,000 armed men among them, and they had conquered 400,000 men or more in the strongest city in all the world, a great city and the best fortified.

[252] On behalf of Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, who was leader of the army, and on behalf of the barons and the doge of Venice, it was then made known throughout the camp that all valuables should be brought forward for collection, as had been promised with sworn oaths and on pain of excommunication. Three churches were named as the sites for this collection, where the French and Venetians set the most trustworthy men they could find to keep guard. And individuals began to come forward with their booty and it was gathered together.

[253] Some were honest in presenting their spoils, others deceitful. Greed, which is the root of all evil, knew no restraint; from that time forward greedy people started to hoard things for themselves, and Our Lord started to love them less. Oh, God – they had behaved so loyally up to that point! And Lord God had demonstrated that in all their affairs he had honoured and exalted them over all other people. But on many occasions good people suffer because of the wicked.

[254] The money and booty were gathered, but you should know that not nearly all of it was brought forward. A good number of people held on to their spoils, despite the threat of excommunication by the pope. What was brought to the churches was gathered together and shared equally between the Franks and the Venetians, as all parties had sworn to do. And know that once this division had been made the pilgrims paid 50,000 marks of silver to the Venetians, and they then had around 100,000 marks of silver to share among their own men. This was how they distributed it: two foot sergeants received the same as one mounted sergeant, while two mounted sergeants received the same as one knight. And you should know that no one received more than this on account of his higher rank or particular prowess, unless it was decided in advance that he should have it – or unless he stole it. [255] And know that those found guilty of stealing met with severe justice – a good number were hanged. One of the count of Saint-Pol's knights, who had kept booty for himself, was hanged with his shield still at his neck. But there were many, of both higher and lower ranks, who had kept their booty and were not found out. You should be certain that the spoils were large; apart from what was stolen and the Venetians' share, they amounted to around 400,000 marks of silver as well as around 10,000 horses of various kinds. Thus were the spoils of Constantinople distributed, as you have just heard.

CHAPTER 8

The Election of an Emperor and its Aftermath

(April–August 1204)

[256] All the people of the army met in an assembly and stated their wish that an emperor be elected, as had been agreed. Their discussions went on so long that they fixed another day on which they would appoint the twelve men who would make the election. Inevitably, a large number of men yearned for or lusted after a dignity as great as that of emperor of Constantinople. But the principal disagreement on this point concerned Count Baldwin of Flanders and Hainaut and Marquis Boniface of Montferrat; everyone said that one of these two men should be emperor.

[257] When the *preudomes* of the army realized that they all supported either one or other of these two men, they talked among themselves and said, 'Sirs, if we elect one of these two eminent men, the other will be so jealous that he will leave with all his men, and the land might be lost as a result. The land of Jerusalem was nearly lost in a similar situation, when Godfrey of Bouillon was chosen as ruler in the wake of its conquest. The count of Saint-Gilles was so jealous that he persuaded some of the other barons and as many other people as he could to leave the army; a good number of them did as he wished and so few remained in Jerusalem that they would have lost that land' had God not come to their aid. We must be mindful of this, and take care that the same thing doesn't happen to us. [258] Let's think about how we might keep both of them here, and how the other may be satisfied regardless of which one of them is, by God's will, elected as emperor. Whoever is elected emperor should give the other man all the land on the other side of the Straits of Saint George, towards the land of the Turks, along