

The Deeds of
POPE INNOCENT III

by an Anonymous Author

Translated with an Introduction and Notes

by James M. Powell



The Catholic University of America Press

Washington, D.C.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Gesta Innocentii III. English.
The deeds of Pope Innocent III / by an anonymous author ;
translated with an introduction and notes by James M. Powell.
— 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-8132-1362-2 (alk. paper)

1. Innocent III, Pope, 1160 or 61-1216. 2. Papacy—History.

I. Powell, James M. II. Title.

BX1236.G4613 2004

282'.092—dc21

2003004337

LXXXII. Alexius,¹⁴⁵ the son of Isaac, the former emperor of Constantinople, escaped prison and came to the Supreme Pontiff, laying a

143. Despite Innocent III's effort to avoid granting the patriarchal dignity to Basil, this letter makes clear that he regarded himself as patriarch.

144. RI 7:231, 411-12, November 8-15, 1204.

145. He would reign as Alexius IV. He sought support in the West and gained the imperial throne with the help of the crusaders, despite Innocent's opposition. He failed to provide promised support to the crusaders and provoked a rebellion in Constantinople led by Alexius V Ducas, who murdered him on the night of February 8-9, 1204. For a discussion of these events from the Byzantine point of view, see Charles Brand, *Byzantium Confronts the West, 1180-1204* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 250-52. For a more general account, see Warren Treadgold, *A History of the Byzantine State and Society* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), 659-66.

serious complaint about his uncle, Alexius,¹⁴⁶ Emperor of Constantinople, namely, that he had cruelly blinded his father, Isaac,¹⁴⁷ whom he should have honored as brother and lord, and violently seizing the throne, he had imprisoned both him and Alexius himself, his son, bound them with iron chains. He, therefore, sought justice concerning him, against whom the same emperor had sent his ambassadors and letters to the Supreme Pontiff, whose content is explained in his Apostolic letter responding to the emperor. He also dealt with other matters upon which the same emperor had written him:

We have received the letter and ambassadors of the Imperial Dignity in the proper manner, and we have diligently considered both those matters which the ambassadors desired to propose and those contained in the same letter. Your ambassadors explained further to us and your letter also contained word that, since the army of the Christians, which is about to come to the aid of the Holy Land proposed to invade the land of your Greatness and to use weapons against Christians, it was fitting to our office that we should recall them from such a plan, lest perhaps befouling their hands with the murder of Christians, they then both offend God and to no small degree weaken their attack on the enemies of Christ. In addition, on the part of your Highness, they added that we should in no way show favor to Alexius, the son of Isaac Angelus, the former emperor, who approached Duke Philip of Swabia so that he could, with his help against you, obtain the throne, because the throne ought not to come to him for any reason, since it is conferred not by heredity but by election of the nobles, unless perhaps he was begotten after the height of the imperial dignity had been achieved, and Alexius could not claim this, since he was born before his father was promoted to the emperorship. Because his father was then a private person in the empire he could not claim something as a right for himself. But we responded to your imperial Prudence in the following manner, that the aforesaid Alexius some time ago approached our presence and in our presence and that of our brethren, with many noble Romans there, proposed a serious question, asserting that you seized his father unjustly and against his will, caused him to be blinded, and handed

146. Alexius III, to whom the following letter is addressed.

147. For Isaac II, see Treadgold, *Byzantine State*, 656–59.

them over to be detained in prison. Because he had no recourse to a superior, and we were, according to the apostle, debtors to both the wise and the foolish, we were required to do justice to him. When we responded to him as we saw was useful, he departed from us and hastened quickly to his brother-in-law, Philip, with whom he carried on deliberations so that Philip sent his ambassadors to the princes of the Christian army without any delay, asking and petitioning them that, because he and his father had been wrongfully despoiled of the imperial throne, they ought to enter the kingdom of Constantinople with him, and give counsel and show favor to recover it for him. He promised that he was prepared to help them magnificently in all things both in aid of the Holy Land and in expenses and gifts and to stand by all our commands, and that he wanted to honor the Holy Roman church in all ways that he could and carry out those things which would be pleasing to our will. But after the princes had deliberated, they responded that since they could not and ought not proceed in such an arduous business without our authority and mandate, they wished to consult us on these matters and then to await the pleasure of our will. They persuaded our beloved son, Peter, cardinal priest of Saint Marcellus,¹⁴⁸ who had taken passage with them, to return to our presence and seek our will upon all these matters. Indeed, the cardinal approached our presence and took care diligently to propose everything to us, and when your ambassadors come into our presence, we will discuss these matters with our brethren and make a decision that should be pleasing to your merit, although several persons assert that we ought to show kindly favor to a request on his behalf, because the Greek Church is less obedient and devoted to the Apostolic See.¹⁴⁹

LXXXIII. When massive preparations for aid to the province of Jerusalem were undertaken both in Italy and Gaul, the crusader counts of the Gauls sent their ambassadors to Italy to the doge and people of Venice to obtain suitable transport ships for themselves. They also agreed to enter equally into a *societas*,¹⁵⁰ and afterward, under certain agreements they reached, there was a provision that in ad-

148. I.e., Peter Capuanus. See Maleczek, *Papst und Kardinalskolleg von 1191 bis 1216*, 117–24.

149. RI 5:121(122), 239–43, November 16, 1202.

150. A *societas* was a common type of commercial contract.

dition to those headed at some time to Syria, the rest would go to Egypt to capture Alexandria and the surrounding areas, and thus the Holy Land might be more easily freed from the hands of the pagans. When, therefore, the Franks and the Venetians signed a *societas*, they both sent ambassadors to the Apostolic See asking the Supreme Pontiff to confirm by his Apostolic authority the agreements they had made for the aid of the Holy Land. But sensing what was to come, he responded cautiously that he would order those agreements to be confirmed in such a way that they would not injure Christians, unless perhaps they wrongfully impeded in their journey, or for some other just and necessary reason they could not act otherwise, but only with the approval of the legate of the Apostolic See. But the Venetians were unwilling to accept the confirmation on these terms. For this reason, their intention was certainly understood by the result of their deeds when it later became clear. Meanwhile, it happened that Theobald, Count of Troyes,¹⁵¹ who had prepared himself magnificently for the journey of pilgrimage, paid the debt of the flesh. The rest of the counts and barons, with the advice of the King of France, therefore, called on Boniface, Marquis of Montferrat,¹⁵² and made him the leader of the Christian army, handing over most of the money that the count had collected for the aid of the Holy Land. He, indeed, made a trip from France through Germany, where he was said to have held negotiations with Philip, Duke of Swabia, who was acting as king, so that he might obtain the aid of the Christian army to bring Alexius, his brother-in-law, the son of Isaac, the former emperor of Constantinople, whose sister Philip himself had married, who had fled to him from prison, back to Constantinople to obtain the Empire of Romania. When the marquis approached the Supreme Pontiff on this same mission, he began to negotiate from afar. But when he understood that

151. Theobald III, count of Champagne, member of a distinguished family of crusaders, was one of the chief leaders of the Fourth Crusade.

152. Boniface was member of a family with extensive ties to the East, including the Byzantine Empire.

the pope's mind was unfavorable to this matter, after he had discussed the business of the cross, he returned to his territories.

LXXXIV. How diligent and solicitous, committed and prepared Innocent was in supporting the needs of the Holy Land so that he might inflame the Christian army is clearly evident from the letters he sent about this business. Since there are many and diverse examples of these, I have felt that this one should be included here:

To the archbishops, bishops, and other prelates of churches constituted in the Kingdom of France. Both we and you, indeed all, summoned to the lot of the Lord, must fear lest the men of Nineveh [Mt 12:41] rise up in judgment with us and with our clerics and condemn you since they did penance at the preaching of Jonah, but you, until now, not only did not open your hearts but did not want to open your hands at our oft repeated command to aid the poor Jesus Christ, to relieve the disgrace to which he is continuously exposed by the enemies of our faith. For, behold, once more is the Crucified nailed to his cross, once more is he cut down by blows, beaten, again the hate of the haters falls upon him, when his enemies say: "if you are the son of God, save yourself" [Mt 27:40]. Indeed if you can, free the land of your birth from our hands and restore your cross to its worshippers. But we have chiefly learned and sorrowed that often when we asked again and again, you would not give a small drink of cold water so that now, the laity, whom you invited to the support of the cross not with deeds but with words, take up that evangelical saying: "They make heavy burdens for the shoulders of their subjects, but they are themselves unwilling to lift even a finger" [Mt 23:4]. Now you are reproached by the laity that you would more willingly support actors than Christ, you consume more in feeding dogs and birds than you are willing to pay for his aid, abundant deeds for others, miserliness or, as we more truly say, avarice for them. Is this what you give him for what he has given to you? Is this how you love him? Is this the way you respond to his manifold benefits?

So you should show more clearly how you lay down your souls for the sheep [Jn 10:11], you who are not willing up to the present to pay even the fortieth share of your incomes for him; when some of you are required to pay not only a fortieth according to the terms of our mandate but a thirtieth, according to the promise made at the Council of Dijon for

the celebration of the Divine liturgies in their presence. But if perhaps some indulgence is presented to you which seems doubtful or difficult, so that you cannot easily judge its merits, you should send it to our presence. You should undertake to advise diligently and to persuade your parish clergy that they should not presume to convene tournaments for at least five years, laying against the persons of those who dare to act in a contrary manner sentences of excommunication and interdict on their lands, after annulling the obstacle of appeal, and forbidding the Divine liturgy to be celebrated in their presence wherever they come. You should not relax earlier sentences against them, and they should solemnly abjure tournaments for the aforesaid period. Moreover, we, from the mercy of God, and trusting in the authority of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, from that power which God has granted us, though unworthy, of binding and loosing, grant to all who will undergo the labor of this journey in their own persons and at their own expense a full indulgence of all their sins, for which they will require penance of heart and mouth, and we promise in return for their just actions an increase of eternal salvation. Moreover, we grant full remission of their sins to those who do not go there personally but only send suitable men, to remain there for at least a year at their own expense, depending on their status and capacity, and likewise to those who, even at the expense of another, fulfill the labor of taking up the pilgrimage in their own persons. We also desire that everyone who gives a fitting subvention for that land from their own goods should share in this remission according to the amount of their support and the strength of their devotion. In addition, ~~we have taken the persons and goods of those~~ who have taken the cross under the protection of St. Peter and ourselves, as well as under that of the archbishops and all the prelates of the church of God. If anyone defies this, he should be compelled by ecclesiastical censure with the right of appeal set aside. But if, indeed, those setting forth have been forced by the oath to assume usury, you, our brother archbishops and bishops, throughout your dioceses, may absolve them from their oaths and force their creditors by the same legal action, with the obstacle of appeal set aside, to desist from further exactions. But if any of the creditors force them to pay usury, you will compel him to make restitution by the same legal measure, with the obstacle of appeal set aside. We command that Jews should be forced by the secular power to remit usury,¹⁵⁷

157. I.e., to forego interest on loans. There was an increasing anti-Jewish tone in

and until they remit it, we order that all contact by the Christian faithful of any kind in merchandising and other matters be completely forbidden them. Nevertheless, we also desire and command that if any of the crusaders are burdened by so much debt that their income is not sufficient to pay for the expenses of the pilgrimage, you should work diligently to advise and persuade their creditors, whom family poverty does not excuse, to delay the terms of payment for a period of up to three years. Moreover, we appoint as our delegates in all these matters our brethren, the bishops of Paris and Soissons and our beloved sons, the abbots of Valserne and of St. Victor as executors of these regulations which we order to be carried out under ecclesiastical jurisdiction and they should exercise the office of admonishment in those matters for which we order that some persons should be admonished.¹⁵⁸

LXXXV. At the appointed time, the crusader army, both large and strong, devout and feared, arrived in Venetian territory, so that without doubt one might believe that by it the Lord would renew the miracles of the past, and not only would the province of Jerusalem be recovered, but the kingdom of Babylon¹⁵⁹ would also be captured. For the Venetians had prepared such a magnificent fleet, that hardly ever had such great naval preparations been seen or heard of. The Lord Pope, therefore, sent Peter, cardinal priest of the title of Saint Marcellus, legate of the Apostolic See, to the army gathered at Venice so that he might set out with it in the name of the Redeemer. The Doge and the counselors of the Venetians, fearing lest he get in the way of their plan of laying siege to Zara, which they had evilly conceived, said that if he wanted to go with them, they would allow him but he could not exercise the office of legate but only that of preaching. Otherwise he should return. Although this displeased the Franks, still he returned dishonored by the Venetians, explaining in the clearest terms their evil intention to the pope. He sent letters to all crusaders, strictly for-

this period. In this instance, we should note that Jews were not subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction, hence Innocent's appeal to secular rulers to enforce his decision.

158. Potthast, *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum*, 1:97(1045), April–May 1200.

159. A medieval name for Cairo, hence Egypt as a whole.

bidding them to attack the lands of Christians, and by name, Zara, which the king of Hungary, who was also a crusader, held in his possession. Otherwise, they should know that they would be bound with the chain of anathema, and he ordered this prohibition and excommunication to be made more certain to them by the abbot of Lucedio.¹⁶⁰ The Marquis of Montferrat, who had been forbidden in this matter by the oral command of the pope, prudently absented himself; he did not make the journey with them to attack Zara.

LXXXVI. The letter which the pope sent them shows to what extent he was angered at the way they went about destroying Zara:

We sorrow not a little and are disturbed that in those matters in which we were accustomed to weigh out the grace of forgiveness and to promise an increase of eternal retribution, now that we do not speak without much sorrow, we are forced to deny the encouragement of our salutation and the protection of Apostolic benediction. For behold, gold has been changed to a base metal and the silver has almost completely rusted, since, departing from the purity of your plan, you have turned in envy from the path, as though you have withdrawn your hand from the plow and have looked back with Lot's wife [Gn 19:26]. For when you should have hastened in flight from Egypt to the land flowing with honey and milk, you wandered away into the solitude [Ex 3:8]. You led your mind back to where you sat in the fleshpots in Egypt, where you are not only hungry for garlic and exotic foods but thirst after the blood of your brethren. Of course, mindful of the serpent of old, how God put enmities between the seed of the woman and it after the fall of the first human beings, because it could not prevail in the head, crawling on its belly [Gn 3:14], it hid itself in the road so that it could strike the hooves of the horses and throw the rider to the ground together with the horse. It arranged by its usual slyness in trickery and accustomed malignity in injuring to corrupt the whole mass of the leaven and all you have done. You lose the merit of your entire labor when you offend in one thing. Heeding further the ancient enemy who is the devil and Satan, who seduces the whole world, that no one has greater love than that someone lays down his life for his friends [Jn 15:13], that he might deprive you of the affection and mercy of such love, he has caused

160. Peter of Magnano, from Vercelli.

you to make war on your brethren and to deploy your banners first against peoples of the faith so that you will pay him the first fruits of the pilgrimage and shed your blood and that of your brethren. You, having the pretext of not going to Jerusalem but rather of descending into Egypt, have descended from Jerusalem to Jericho and have thereby fallen among thieves [Lk 10:30], who have also despoiled you of the mantle of your virtues and imposed the stripes of sins on you after you have been despoiled. And they still did not want to depart until now nor to leave you half alive, since now plots are hatched among you by evil angels so that you both alter your course to the islands for your necessities and convert the spoils of Christians for your incomes, as we recently learned that you have done at Zara.

For when this fleet arrived there, raising your banners first against the city, you put up your tents for the siege and surrounded the city on all sides and undermined their walls, but not without considerable bloodshed. When the citizens wanted to undergo a trial with the Venetians in our court, and they could not even find mercy in you, they hung images of the cross around their walls. But you, to the injury of the Crucified, nonetheless fought against the city and the citizens and forced them to surrender by violence. Moreover, either reverence for taking the cross or devotion of the most beloved in Christ our dear son Emmerich, King of the Hungarians, and the noble duke Andrew his brother, who for the support of the Holy Land assumed the sign of the cross, or at least the authority of the Apostolic See, which took care to prohibit you strictly lest you try to invade and injure the lands of Christians, unless they either wickedly impeded your journey or perhaps some other just or necessary reason should occur, on account of which you could act with the counsel of the legate, should have deterred you from your very wicked plan. Lest our prohibition was not clearly heard, if anyone dared to act contrary to it, we announced that they would be bound by the chain of excommunication and deprived of the benefits of the indulgences which the Apostolic See granted to crusaders. But although our beloved son, Peter, cardinal priest of Saint Marcellus, legate of the Apostolic See, took care to explain the terms of our prohibition to some of you, and finally our letter was publicly presented to you, you paid no attention to God or to the Apostolic See but forced the miserable Zarans to surrender. The Venetians, therefore, subverted the walls of the same city in your sight, despoiled its churches, destroyed its buildings, and divided the spoils of Zara with you.

Lest, therefore, you should add sin to sin and fulfill in yourselves what we read: "The sinner values little when he arrives in the depth of vices" [Prv 18:3], we admonish your whole group and we exhort you more energetically and we command by Apostolic letter, and under the terms of the anathema we strictly order that you should neither destroy Zara further than it has been destroyed up to this point nor cause it to be destroyed, or as much as you can control, but arrange to restore all that has been taken to the ambassadors of the same king. Otherwise you should know that you will be subject to the sentence of excommunication and deprived of the grant of remission promised you.¹⁶¹

LXXXVII. But the princes of the Franks, recognizing their excess, swore in the hands of their bishops that they would obey the commands of the Lord Pope in this matter, and as a result, they were absolved by the bishops. They sent the Bishop of Soissons to the Apostolic See in order to mitigate the anger of the Supreme Pontiff and they advised him how they would proceed in this matter. But he ordered by his letter that they, worthily penitent for such an excess and in order to make suitable satisfaction for sin, should return everything that had come to them from the spoils of the Zarans and should, for the future, abstain completely from similar things. But because no one could relax the sentence of the Apostolic See save on papal authority, he authorized certain discrete men to receive the oath to obey the ~~Apostolic mandates from those who had not yet sworn.~~ Moreover, they should require those who had taken the oath to recognize how they had sworn in their presence and then they should grant absolution to all according to the form of absolution of the church, enjoining on the counts and barons, under the obligation of the oath, that they and their heirs should be required by letters patent to the Apostolic See to make satisfaction concerning such presumption at his command. They should also command everyone for the future to abstain from similar affairs, save for other commands that he might order about this. Still the counts and barons obligated themselves as they

161. RI 5:160(161), 315-17, December 15-31, 1202.

were required and so all were absolved. But the Venetians, like those who celebrate when they have done something wrong and rejoice in the worst things, were neither willing to do penance nor to seek absolution. To the issues raised by the Franks, the Lord Pope wrote again in this manner:

If you are truly sorry for what you have done and propose to make full satisfaction for your sin, we believe, indeed, we now know, that God is pleased with you. If the Venetians could be persuaded to make satisfaction and should merit to receive the benefit of absolution, you could certainly set sail with them and with them fight the Lord's battle. But if they are unwilling to make satisfaction or to be absolved, like those who are said not to sorrow but to rejoice in what they have done, we permit you to cross by ship with them into the land of the Saracens or to the province of Jerusalem, depending on what has been decided or will be decided between you and them. For this period of time you can maintain communication with them, but with sorrow and in bitterness of heart and under the hope of forgiveness. For since they have received the largest amount of the money for passage and they cannot be persuaded or even forced to restore it, if it should happen otherwise, we see that you would suffer a loss from your penitence and they would obtain a reward from contumacy, since they continue to be obligated to pay this debt to you and what is owed can be exacted and received from those who have been excommunicated. Moreover, it is a certainty in law that if anyone should travel through the land of heretics or any excommunicated persons, he can buy and receive necessities from them. In addition, if the head of the household should be excommunicated, his family is excused from participation. Although, therefore, the Lord Doge of the Venetian fleet remains excommunicated like the head of a house, you, like his family, will be excusable by God as long as you are in those ships. His excommunication will not affect you if you are in the ships of the excommunicates with sorrow of heart and you are in contact with those who have been excommunicated, whose contact you cannot avoid, under hope of their penitence.

But when you leave the ships either in the land of the Saracens or in the province of Jerusalem, if the Venetians have not been persuaded or compelled to make satisfaction according to the form of absolution of the church, you should not dare to fight the battle of the Lord with them lest, if you raise up those having something of the anathema against the ene-

mies of the cross, you do not prevail against them, but turning your backs, instead, you run away and perish. For we read in the Book of Joshua that when Achan, the son of Carmi [Jos 7:1-25], stole a scarlet mantle of great value and two hundred shekels of silver and a gold bar weighing fifty shekels of Jericho, the Lord of Israel was angered. Wherefore, when three thousand soldiers marched against the city of Ai, they were immediately struck by the men of Ai and fled, and thirty-six men fell. Their enemies pursued them from the gate to Sabirim and they killed those fleeing until evening, and no sooner did the Lord hand the city of Ai over to Israel than the people stoned Achan and consumed all of his goods by fire [Jos 8:1; 7:25-26]. In Paralipomenon, also, when Josaphat, King of Judah, had made a treaty with Ochosia, King of Israel, whose works were very evil, and they made ships to go to Tarsus, we read that Eleazer, the son of Dodacus of Maressa, prophesied to Josaphat and said, "Because you have a treaty with Ochosia, the Lord has struck at your works, and your ships are destroyed and cannot go to Tarsus" [2 Chr 20:35-37]. In the book of Maccabees, we read that when Judas ascended against Gorgia, the governor of Idumea, with three thousand infantry and four hundred cavalry, few were destroyed in the battle [2 Mc 12:32-34]. When afterward, Judas wanted to put the slain bodies in their paternal tombs, he found beneath the tunics of those killed votive offerings of idols which were at Iamnia and which were forbidden by Jewish law. Therefore, it was made clear to everyone why those who had perished had been destroyed [2 Mc 12:39].

~~But lest they should lack supplies, we have written to our beloved son,~~ the emperor of Constantinople, that just as he promised us in his letters he should cause foodstuffs to be furnished to you. But if perhaps he deny these things, since you are still vowed to the common support of the Crucified, to whom the land and its fullness belong, the world and all who dwell in it, and it would not seem absurd for the emperor of the land, who controls security by civil law, if his army has a need for food, to take it from anywhere, so you can also with fear of the Lord, but under the plan of making satisfaction for need, take these things without injury to any persons. We also find in the Book of Judges that, when Gideon immediately pursued Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian, and he first asked for bread from the men of Succoth and secondly from the inhabitants of Penuel for the people who had come with him and were now almost starving. Because they denied him what he asked for, after he returned as victor he brought the elders of the city of Succoth both the

thorns of the desert and thistles and he afflicted them and he crushed the men of Succoth; he also undermined the tower of Penuel, killing the inhabitants of the city [Jgs 8:5–9, 13–17]. For necessity, especially when it is applied to a necessary work, excuses much and in many things. For when the Lord passed through the cornfields on the sabbath and his disciples wanted some ears and, rubbing them in their hands, they ate them, and some of the pharisees called out to the disciples: “What you are doing is not allowed on the Sabbath.” We read that Jesus answered them: “Have you not read what David did when he and those who were with him were thirsty, how he came into the house of God and took the loaves of offering that only the priests were allowed to eat” [Mk 2:26–28]? And he further added that “the son of man is also the Lord of the Sabbath.” But both this and battle of the Lord that you intend to fight are also the business of the son of man [Lk 6:1–5]. We have drawn these holy *exempla* from scripture, not to make a concession to wrongdoing but to tolerate what cannot be avoided out of serious necessity without great expense. But you should provide prudently and with security that, if perhaps the Venetians seek some opportunities to break up the army, you will take care to overlook it for a time and to tolerate it until you arrive at the appointed place, when with the opportunity at hand, you may restrain their malice as is useful.¹⁶²

LXXXVIII. And so the Lord Pope sent Soffredus, cardinal priest of the title of Santa Prassede, ahead to the province of Jerusalem to exercise the office of legate. He ordered him to be given a thousand two hundred pounds to distribute for the necessities of his company and for the use of the Holy Land, as he might think best. He also sent Peter, cardinal priest of the title of St. Marcellus, after him so that, if possible, he might join the crusaders, or if that was not possible, that he might cross over to Syria, and he gave him the same amount of money for the same reasons. Both, however, crossed one after the other to the province of Jerusalem, by way of the island of Cyprus, and carried out those things they had been ordered to do. Soffredus went first and he found the Patriarch of Jerusalem near death. ~~A few days later, he~~

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162. RI 6:102, 165–68, about June 20, 1203.

LXXXIX. The Bishop of Vercelli humbly approached the Apostolic See and acquiesced, and, having been raised to the patriarchate, received not only the *pallium* but also the office of legate to be exercised for four years in his province. He then departed Genoa and sailed to Syria.

But just as Philip had met with the Marquis of Montferrat, he sent Alexius, his brother-in-law, namely, the son of Isaac, the former emperor of Constantinople, and under the clever mediation of the same Marquis, an agreement was reached between him and the Christian army that the army would take him back to Greece and would aid him to obtain the empire of Constantinople. He would pay them the promised money and he would keep the other agreements reached with them after he obtained the empire. But when this news came to the Supreme Pontiff, he wrote to them in this vein:

164. RI 7:222, 393-95, February 17, 1205. Letter to Albert, bishop of Vercelli.

Since with a strong hand and extended arm [Dt 5:15] you have gone out from Egypt in order to offer yourselves in sacrifice to the Lord, we have been not a little pained and are sorry that until now Pharaoh pursues you as you flee, or rather you follow the Pharaoh [Ex 14:8], who puts pressure on you under a certain kind of necessity and a veil of piety to subject yourselves to servitude under the yoke of an ancient sin. We have sorrowed, moreover, just as we have set forth earlier and we sorrow for ourselves equally and for the entire Christian people. For ourselves, because, what we have sowed in tears [Ps 125:5], through legates and our letters to you and others, often not without a certain bitterness of heart and anxiety of body, setting forth energetically the word of the Lord and exhorting Christians to avenge the injury of the Crucified, we have believed that we would be harvesters in exaltation [Ps 125:5] so that unknown to us an enemy of our harvest has sown cockles and spoiled the seeds so that the wheat would seem to have degenerated into tares [Mt 13:25]. On your behalf, however, because, when you have purged the old leaven [1 Cor 5:7], you believe that you have put off the old man with his acts, still a trifle of leaven, even a little, corrupts the whole mass and, because you have not kept your garments white, as if you have again put on an old mantle, withdrawing your hand from the plow, and looking back with the wife of Lot [Gn 19:26], you are no more fit to see, according to the apostle, the kingdom of God [Lk 9:62]. Moreover, we have sorrowed and we continue to sorrow for the Christian people, because it is made more humble by what it is believed to be exalted.

For since many, who preceded you in support of the Holy Land, on hearing that you have not boarded ships, despairing about your proximate passage, have returned home. The Saracens, doubtful about your arrival and unconcerned about their departure, arose against Christian souls to see how (and we are unwilling to say how, because of sin, since it would become known almost everywhere) they might prevail against them. Moreover, we rejoice that, after the receipt of our letter, understanding your excessive wandering, you have carried out the Apostolic mandate with devotion and humility and, having sworn or certified on oath, you have received the benefit of absolution, taking on the obligation for yourselves and your heirs, sons, counts, with two Frankish barons, to do satisfaction according to our mandate in the matter for which you have incurred the sentence of excommunication. Moreover, we hope that your penance will be genuine, that you will repent for what you have done so

that you may avoid similar things in the future, because he who acts unrepentant is not a penitent but a deceiver, and just as dogs return to vomit the penitent returns to sin [Prv 26:11; 2 Pt 2:22]. Also, a sin is more serious, when once committed, it is repeated later. Thus none of you should rashly flatter himself that it is licit to occupy the land of the Greeks or to prey upon it for himself, on the grounds that it is less subject to the Apostolic See and that the Emperor of Constantinople, because he deposed and blinded his brother, usurped the empire. Of course, insofar as in this and other matters, the emperor and the men committed to his jurisdiction did wrong, it is still not your business to judge their crimes. You did not take up the cross in order to avenge this injury, but are rather appointed in obedience especially to avenge the shame of the crucified.

For this reason, we warn your nobility and exhort you more firmly and we order you by Apostolic letter that you should neither deceive yourselves nor allow yourselves to be deceived by others so that under the guise of piety you may do those things, which, God forbid, redound to the injury of your souls. Rather, you should cease frivolous opportunities and pretended necessities, and cross over to the aid of the Holy Land, and avenge the injury of the cross. You should take from the spoils of the enemy those things that you would perhaps wrest from your brothers if you delayed in the regions of Romania. Otherwise, because we neither can nor should, we do not promise the favor of remission to you. Moreover, we want you to keep in mind the terms of our prohibition, by which we forbade you under threat of excommunication to invade or attempt to injure ~~the lands of Christians, unless they either impeded your journey in a wrongful manner or some other just and essential reason should intervene, for which reason you should consult with our legates about what is to be done.~~ We warn you not to go against it lightly. So that the fault of the Doge and the Venetians may not redound to your punishment, we desire and order that you should send our letter, which we ordered to be sent to them and to be sent to the same persons who are known to be with you so that they may not find in them an excuse for their sins.¹⁶⁵

XC. Nevertheless, they sailed to Greece and arrived at Constantinople, where their letter sent to the Lord Pope by them set forth what they had done:

165. RI 6:101, 163–65, about June 20, 1203.

How much the Lord has accomplished for us, indeed, not for us but for his name, how much glory he has bestowed in these days, we will briefly relate as well as we can, noting at the beginning that we set out from the city of transgression, for thus we call Zara, whose destruction we looked upon with sorrow indeed, but we were forced by necessity [Ps 65:16; Mk 5:19]. We have remembered that nothing was ordained among us that pertained generally to the utility of the army save that Divine Providence might change it for the better and taking everything on itself might make our wisdom foolish [Rom 1:22; 1 Cor 1:20]. This is why, of the things we did gloriously, we reject all their glory for ourselves. Indeed we brought very little to the work and nothing to the planning. For this reason, if anyone should wish to glorify us, he should glory in the Lord, not in himself or another [1 Cor 1:31].

Therefore, after the treaty of Zara was confirmed with the illustrious Alexius, the son of the former Emperor Isaac, we, who were in need of foodstuffs and other things, realized that the burden of the Holy Land would rather be increased, just as was the case with the others, who had gone ahead of us, rather than bringing any increase in help, nor, in such a state of poverty, did we think that we had the power to attack the land of the Saracens. Indeed, persuaded by similar rumors and arguments that the royal party in the city and the majority of the empire strongly longed for the coming of Alexius, whom it had elevated by a proper election to the imperial crown in a solemn agreement; contrary to the usual situation in that season, with a favorable breeze and the winds and sea obedient to the Lord—beyond all hope, we landed happily in a short time at the royal city [Mt 8:27]. But our arrival did not go unnoticed. We found about sixty thousand knights in addition to infantry in the city. Passing rapidly through the safest places, the bridges, towers, and rivers, without loss of our men we laid siege to the city and the tyrant by land and sea. He, after he had committed parricide against his brother, had defiled the imperial office by a lengthy illegal possession. Contrary to the opinion of everyone, we found the minds of the citizens set against us and the city with its walls and military machines likewise raised against their Lord, as if infidels, who proposed to pollute the holy places and to tear out completely the Christian religion, had come. That most cruel possessor of the Empire, the depriver and betrayer of his lord and brother, the emperor, who had condemned him to prison perpetually without having committed any crime, likewise would have done the same to his son Alexius if he had not fortu-

nately escaped his hands into exile. Afterward, he held a detestable meeting with the people and infected the powerful and the commoners with poison words whereby he maintained that the Latins had come to subvert their ancient liberties and that they would hasten to restore the place and the people to the Roman Pontiff and subject them to the laws of the Latins. When this business was completed, he likewise motivated and armed everyone against us in such a way that everyone seemed to have taken an oath both against us and our exile. Very often through our ambassadors, as well as through our exile himself and our barons, we demanded to be heard by the citizens. But we were not able to explain the reason for our coming nor the nature of our request. As often as we offered by land or by sea to speak to those standing on the wall, we got spears instead of words. We realized, therefore, that everything had happened beyond our expectation. Impelled by necessity we were immediately forced either to perish or to conquer, since we could not reasonably extend our siege more than fifteen days. The unbelievable shortage of all foodstuffs made this necessary. Thus, we were ready to expose ourselves to danger and incredibly to prevail in all things, and we began to cry out for war not indeed from desperation but inspired by a certain faith in Divine Providence. Quite often when we were drawn up on the field of battle, we forced a countless multitude in ignominious flight back into the city.

In the meantime, therefore, with suitable warlike instruments by land and sea we entered the city on the eighth day of the siege. Fire broke out. The emperor put his battle lines in a field against us, and we came prepared to demonstrate our constancy. Astonished at our fewness, still he ignominiously retreated back into the burning city. That very night he fled the city with a few men. He deserted his wife and infant daughter. Unknown to us, when they learned this, the leading members of the Greek aristocracy gathered in the palace and solemnly celebrated the election, or rather the restoration, of the exile, which was announced, and copious lights testified to unexpected joy in the palace. In the morning a large number of the Greek nobles came out to the camp and sought their elect with joy and maintained that liberty had been restored to the city. They showed the returning son, who had been raised to the imperial throne, that his father, the former emperor Isaac, had been released from prison. And so those things that were necessary seemed to be preordained, the new emperor was led in solemn procession to the church of Haghia

Sophia, the imperial crown was restored to our exile with the fullness of power without any contradiction.

After these things had been accomplished, the emperor moved to fulfill his promises and he increased them with things; he offered foodstuffs for a year to be given to us for the service of the Lord; he went on to pay us two hundred thousand marks and he prolonged the Venetian fleet in his service for a year; and he bound himself with an oath that he would raise the royal banner with us and set out with us on the March passage for the service of the Lord with as many thousands of troops as he could and he included under the same promise that he ought to show reverence to the Roman Pontiff, just as his imperial predecessors, the Catholic emperors, were known to have shown to his pontifical predecessors, and that he would also try to influence the eastern church for this purpose as much as he could, and for the whole of his life he would provide fifty knights at his expense to serve the Lord in the Holy Land.¹⁶⁶

Then finally the Doge and the Venetians who were in Greece sent ambassadors to Peter, cardinal priest of Saint Marcellus, the legate of the Apostolic See, begging him for the benefit of absolution. He sent the treasurer of Nicosia in Cyprus to them with his letter and, after he had received from them the oath in the form prescribed by the church, he ordered them to be absolved, although, up to this time, they had done nothing to make satisfaction for what they had done.¹⁶⁷ He preferred to have them imperfect rather than dead, especially that they might not spread their contagion to others.

XCI. Therefore, after Alexius, with Isaac, his father, had been restored to the Empire of Constantinople, and did not keep faith with the Latins, the letter transmitted to the Lord Pope describes how the city of Constantinople was captured and how Baldwin, the count of Flanders, was raised to the Empire.

166. RI 6:210(211), 358-61, about August 25, 1203. I have compared my translation to that by Alfred Andrea, *Contemporary Sources*, 80-84. My special thanks to Prof. Andrea for his assistance.

167. But cf. Innocent's letter to Peter, RI 8 (127) (126), of July 12, 1205. Innocent says that he had only recently learned that Peter has granted absolution to the Venetians.