

Relationship between the byzantine empire and the crusades

[History](#), [Empires](#)



For this essay, I am going to explain how the Byzantine empire is linked to the history of the Crusades, the impact of the crusades on the empire, and the history surrounding it. The Byzantine empire is, in short, the continuation of the Eastern Roman Empire. ^[1] They mainly controlled the areas of Greece to Turkey with the capital set in Constantinople, modern-day Istanbul. They referred to themselves as Romans citizens and the Empire referred to itself as the Eastern Roman empire even after the collapse of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE which was set in modern-day Italy. The name of the Byzantine Empire did not actually come around until after the collapse of the Empire in 1453 and is used by historians to specify the specific time period. ^[2]

The Byzantine Empire unintentionally played a major role in kick-starting the crusades. In 1095 Alexios, the Byzantine Emperor, asks Pope Urban II, who was basically the voice of God for all Christians in Western Europe at the time, asking for mercenary help due to their territory to the east, in the holy land, being taken by Turkish forces nearly destroying the Byzantine army.

Due to the rise of Western Europe, many internal problems came out of it and the pope saw this call for help by Emperor Alexios as essentially a scapegoat or a way to redirect everyone's attention off the problems at home and direct them at a collective enemy. Later that same year of the call for help Pope Urban II sends out a call to arms for all to reclaim the Holy Land. ^[3] In his sermons he says things like " The Lord wants us to help the Byzantines against the Islam", " Christ commands it", and most importantly

“ All who die sins will be forgiven”. ^[4] As if God himself told him that all Christians, from the poorest of the poor to the richest of the rich, to send aid to the Byzantines and destroy the Muslims. Alexios only expected to get a few battalions of men from the plea for help from the Pope, instead, eighty thousand warriors from all over western Europe filed into the capital city of Constantinople. Thus starting the crusades.

Emperor Alexios had received much more help than he had asked for, or wanted. When the Western Europeans first arrived they ran wild through the city. Stealing, killing, and whatever they pleased. The city of Constantinople even had to set up a special police guard to protect itself and its inhabitants.

As the Crusades went on and the Crusaders captured, lost, and recaptured the holy land, bit by bit. Needing money for the Fourth Crusade in the Thirteenth century the Crusaders and Venetian traders worked together to get claimant Isaac II, the younger brother of the Emperor at the time Alexios III, ^[5] on the throne because he had promised them all the riches of Constantinople and aid for their future endeavors. “ In 1203 two hundred and ten Venetian ships arrived outside Constantinople” ^[6] and set siege, attacking the city. Not even seven months after appointing Isaac II to the throne he is killed in a revolt of the people led by Alexios V. The now Emperor Alexios V tried to repel the crusaders, they again attacked the city this time with no remorse. ^[7] Due to the differences in the Crusaders Catholic Christianity and the Byzantines Orthodox beliefs, there had been bad blood between the two from the moment of the first arrival at the first

Crusade. [8] The Crusader army pillaged the entire city, “ desecrating the churches by sacking them taking everything of worth, raping the nuns, having mass homicidal orgies inviting the whores from the camp.” [9] A Greek Emperor in exile by the name of Michael snuck back into the ruined city after the crusaders had ruined it and took over. The crusaders who had left to raid the holy land in the east had little use for the ruin and overlooked it. [10] Once the Constantinopelians noticed the Crusaders were not coming back they went to work rebuilding.

The Byzantine Empire finally fell in 1453 when the Ottomans successfully sieged and sacked Constantinople. After hundreds of years of constant pressure, the Byzantine Empire couldn't come back and finally collapsed. Constantinople has been renamed for the third time and is now Istanbul, Turkey. Alexios the Byzantian Emperor unintentionally gave Pope Urban II a lit match in which he used to start the fire that was the Crusades. Alexios is not alone to blame for the fall of the Byzantine but again he, and his successors, played a huge role, along with the Crusaders to significantly weaken the empire from its once glorious state to rubble and ash.

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