Chapter 7

The End

The Sainte-Chapelle in Paris and the Disappearance of the Mandylion

Unlike what some sindologists have asserted, we know the fate of the now-lost Mandylion of Constantinople.\(^1\) From March 1204, before the attack on the city, the Crusaders had determined that the two great imperial palaces of Constantinople, Blachernae and Bucoleon, would become the property of the Latin emperor of Constantinople. On April 13, after the Latins entered the city, both palaces were seized.\(^2\) Geoffroy de Villehardouin witnessed the events and described them:

At the same time that this palace [of Bucoleon] was surrendered to the Marquis Boniface of Montferrat, the palace of Blachernae was surrendered to Henry, the brother of Count Baldwin of Flanders, on the condition that no damage should be done to the bodies of those who were therein. There too was found much treasure, not less than in the palace of Bucoleon. Each crusader garrisoned with his own people the castle that had been surrendered to him, and set a guard over the treasure. And the other people, spread widely throughout the city, also gained much booty.\(^3\)

The city was looted between April 13th to the 15th, but both palaces were spared. Just before the election of the Latin emperor the palaces were abandoned by their occupiers and placed in the hands of a common guard so that the newly elected emperor could access them immediately without fear of resistance.\(^4\)

If each of the two crusaders – Henry of Hainaut and Boniface of Montferrat – “garrisoned with his own people the castle that had been surrendered to him,

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1 Cf. D.C. Scavone, “A Review of Recent Scholarly Literature,” cit., p. 456: “No text asserts that the Holy Face of Edessa was ever destroyed.” While there is no explicit record of its destruction, it is widely known that it was lost in 1793, and most likely destroyed, just as many other relics in France.
3 G. de Villehardouin, La conquête de Constantinople, 250. Translation by Frank T. Marzials.
4 Cf. R. de Clari, La conquête de Constantinople, 93–94.
and set a guard over the treasure,” it is unlikely that the relics in the palaces were plundered by individual crusaders who were out of control. But sindologists have attributed the theft of the Mandylion/Shroud to such rogue crusaders and that it arrived in the West via circuitous paths (crusaders, Templars, bishops, sovereigns)\(^5\)

Initially, the Latin emperors tried not to disperse the imperial treasure they had captured and the Mandylion, along with other important relics of the Pharos, was spared the translation to the West.\(^6\) Within a few years though, Baldwin II was running out of money and agreed to negotiate a sale of relics with Louis IX, King of France. Between 1242 and 1248, Louis had built in Paris the sumptuous Sainte-Chapelle, a chapel for his royal palace that functioned as a large-scale reliquary for the sacred objects he purchased from Constantinople. The Byzantine emperor had direct access to the Chapel of Holy Mary of the Pharos through a passage that linked it to his palace. Louis could also go directly from his royal palace to this personal chapel. When the relics arrived in Paris they were placed in an impressive wooden reliquary known as the Grande Chasse, located in a central position near the altar on the upper floor of the chapel.\(^7\)

An official statement survives documenting the transfer of the relics to Louis IX, dated June 1247, and signed by Baldwin.\(^8\) It deserves to be fully quoted:

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\(^5\) All these theories are refuted in A. Nicolotti, *I Templari e la Sindone. Storia di un falso*, cit.

