

**A TURNING POINT IN EUROPEAN HISTORY:
*THE DEVIATION OF THE FOURTH CRUSADE (1204)****

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Abstract: The article discusses the long-term consequences of the 1204 deviation of the Fourth Crusade, considering that this is a much more fertile ground for research than the complex and enigmatic questions of its origin and responsibility. It is argued that in the aftermath of the Latin conquest of Constantinople, what seemed to be only a temporary turn of events became a historical permanency until another fateful year, 1453. Thus, the symbolism of the crusade was increasingly monopolized and instrumented by the Italian Maritime Republics – la Serenissima and la Superba – and put at the service of their mercantile interests. Hence, Venice has managed to build up a true colonial empire in the Aegean Sea, while Genoa imposed its control over the Black Sea and its trade, whose intense exploitation soon assured la Superba's maritime hegemony. The impact of international trade on world politics had never been as strong before. By focusing on the role assumed by the Black Sea in the historical events involving Western and Eastern Europe between 1204 and 1453, the current study examines the Genoese quasi-monopoly over the Pontic trade and its great importance for the evolution of Europe in the Late Middle Ages and for the transition from the Medieval to the Modern world. Therefore, the significant international and integrative function of the Black Sea is discussed and seen as a key mediator between Europe and Asia on the one hand, and between Western and Eastern Europe, on the other hand. Close in the previous centuries, the two parts of the continent split once again from each other as a result of the establishment of a long-time Ottoman hegemony in South Eastern Europe and the Black Sea.

Keywords: Fourth Crusade, Genoa in the Middle Ages, Serenissima Republic of Venice, Black Sea Medieval trade, Genoese sea merchant

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