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Crusading in Livonia and Byzantine Romania Considered in a Comparative Review. Key Issues and Historiographical Notes

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CRUSAADING IN LIVONIA AND BYZANTINE ROMANIA
CONSIDERED IN A COMPARATIVE REVIEW
KEY ISSUES AND HISTORIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Abstract. The article focuses on a topic that so far has not been studied in a comparative approach. The author addresses some basic problems of the comparative research, focusing on the general and the specific causes, the course, and the consequences of the crusading actions in the lands of Livonia and Estonia – in the northeast, and Romania – in the southeast. Reconsidering the already established models and theses in historical research on the Baltic campaigns, on the one hand, and the Third, the Fourth, and the Fifth Crusades, on the other, the author formulates some guidelines and approaches for a comparative study on crusading 'on the edges' in the late 12th – the early 13th centuries. The article analyzes several factors including the role of geographical and climatic conditions, the demographic expansion, the papal policy, the commercial maritime activity, and the role of the Knightly orders in the crusading campaigns under review. Furthermore, the author explores the political and social background of the crusading campaigns under question and the different models of interaction between the colonization stratum and the local population in Livonia and the Latin Empire in Constantinople.

Keywords: Medieval Crusades, Livonia, Romania, Latin Empire of Constantinople

The crusade activity in the Baltic and Byzantine territories has a long history and various aspects, but one of the common features is its permanence in the years after the initial conquests at the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century (1198–1205). In the lands of the Eastern Baltic, it manifested in new military campaigns led by the Order of Sword Brothers, the Teutonic Order, the Bishop of Riga, the Danish Crown, and other political and military factors. Similarly, a series of crusades were declared in defense of the Frankish states which were set up in the formerly Byzantine territories. This development defined the policy of the papacy, of the Latin crusaders, and the local states and authorities, and had a profound impact on Greco-Bulgarian-Latin relations in the thirteenth century. The late 12th and the early 13th century were characterized by an intense crusade movement, directed not only towards the Holy Lands but also the Eastern Baltic lands and Byzantine Empire (the lands of Romania). These crusades
changed, to a greater or lesser extent, the course of local history and, despite the considerable geographical distance, they were a manifestation of common (or similar) ambitious religious, political, and economic interests.

What was shared between and specific about the Livonian crusade from the first half of the 13th century and the Fourth Crusade (1202–1204)? What were the motives, the driving forces, and the ultimate goals of the papal policy in the Baltic region and the Balkans at the beginning of the 13th century? What were the consequences of these crusades for the Baltic and Balkan peoples? What were the shared and distinguishing characteristics of the *Terra Mariana* founded in 1207 and the *Latin Empire* established in former Byzantine lands in 1204, with Constantinople as its political centre? What was the scale of commercial activities involved in the Livonian crusade and the Fourth Crusade? What were the general and the specific trends in the history of the Southeastern region and of the East-Baltic region in the first three decades of the 13th century when locals were strongly affected by the expanding papal power and influence on the eastern borders of the European continent? These are just some of the issues that can be the basis of such a comparative study. This paper is aimed at mapping out the main problems and a brief historiographical overview to further comparative interdisciplinary research of the Crusades and their consequences in Livonia and Romania.

Yet, despite their importance, to date these expeditions and crusading activities have not been systematically examined in a comparative approach. As far as the state of the research related to the issue is concerned, so far no comparative studies have been carried out on the Livonian Crusade and the Fourth Crusade. The only close studies have been devoted to comparative research between the Crusaders in the Iberian peninsula and the Baltic region and between the Baltic Crusades and the Holy Lands1. Bulgarian historiography too lacks a comparative study of the mentioned processes in Livonia and Romania during the period in question. The historical parallels between Livonia and Romania (Latin Empire of Constantinople) have been partially explored.

However, as far as research on the Baltic Crusades is concerned, the period is the subject of considerable research activity. First of all, I would note some Latvian and Estonian historians and archaeologists as I. Šterns, A. Šnē, E. Eihmane, A. Levâns, G. Zariņa, M. Sound, A. Selart and A. Mänd2. The Baltic Crusades,

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the military orders, and the early history of medieval Livonia are also brilliantly presented in the research of historians as Nils Blomkvist and Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, Richard Spence, Barbara Bombi (the Popes, the Catholic church and the Baltic Crusades), Eric Christiansen, John Lind, Alan Murray, William Urban, Roman Czaja, A. Pluskowski and H. Valk (the Livonian Sword Brothers, the Teutonic Order, and the conquest of Livonia)\(^3\). These studies are only part of the vast historiography on the problems of the Livonian Crusades. They do not present in full the historiographical base, but point to opportunities for comparative

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research regarding other regions and crusades – in this case the Fourth Crusade and the Balkans in the period under consideration.

The comparative approach to studying society has a long tradition dating back to the Ancient World. Since the nineteenth century, philosophers, anthropologists, political scientists, and historians have used cross-cultural comparisons to achieve various objectives. For researchers adopting a normative perspective, comparisons have served as a tool for developing classifications of social phenomena and for establishing whether the shared phenomena can be explained by the same causes. For many researchers, comparisons have provided an analytical framework for examining and explaining social and cultural differences and specificities.

A research study on this topic requires a comparative historical and intercultural analysis, thus aiming at (and emphasizing) the similarities and substantial differences between Livonia and the Balkans in the first half of the 13th century. Such a comparative study also requires careful definition of chronological boundaries that correspond to specific events and dates in the Crusading activity in the Eastern Baltic and the Balkans in the first decades of the 13th century. In my opinion, the beginning can be set at the start of the Livonian Crusade in 1198 or the very end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th century. In fact, only four years separate 1198 and the beginning of the Fourth Crusade in 1202. Following the above, the starting chronological date of this research can be fixed in 1198, and the end can be marked by Gregory IX’s attempted expeditions in defense of the Latin Empire in the years 1238–1240.

Such a comparative study requires careful identification of key issues and subtopics. In the first place, I would define the evolution of crusading in the context of political circumstances across Europe, the role of the papal policy in Livonia and Romania in the first decades of the 13th century. One of the specific objectives

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regarding the issue is the Vatican politics from the first half of the 13th century (the pontificates of Innocent III, Honorius III, and Gregory IX), when both the Eastern Baltic and the Balkans were strongly affected by the expanding papal power and a series of crusades directed to the eastern borders of Latin Europe. Also, the role of the pontificate of Pope Gregory IX and the apogee of the crusading activity against John III Vatatzes and John II Asen and in helping Latin Romania must be emphasized. The studies on the Crusades, especially on the Fourth Crusade and its impact on the Balkan peoples and states, are also numerous and diverse.

This brief overview cannot represent the enormous historiography based on Papal politics, the Livonian Crusade, and the Fourth Crusade, but the studies conducted so far are a reliable basis for comparative research of the history of the Baltic and Balkan regions at the end of the 12th and in the 13th century.


But in the wider scope of the Crusades in Livonia and Romania, more general issues can be distinguished. That is the reason why I would next point to the problem of the technology of the Crusading warfare in the Eastern Baltic and Romania, which can be examined in terms of the military strategy, the role of military orders, the armaments and tactics of the opposing armies in these large-scale and protracted military conflicts. Among the important topics are the role of the military orders in Livonia and the Balkans at the end of the 12th and the first three decades of the 13th century. Also, I would like to stress the fact that Greeks, Bulgarians, and the Baltic peoples succeeded in fighting and defeating the Crusaders by forming alliances against the powerful knights. In parallel, Lithuania and some Russian principalities played an important role in the military conflicts in Livonia in the first decades of the 13th century. A similar role in the south

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was played by the Bulgarians, who, in alliance with the Cumans, the Vlachs, and at times with the Greeks in Thrace, entered into a bloody conflict with the newly established Latin Empire. What were the political, religious, and cultural motives for such a confrontation? What were the consequences for the local societies and their leaders after the emergence of the new Crusaders states – Livonia and Latin Empire? Undoubtedly, a comparative approach calls for an answer to these and a host of other questions.

Quite interesting are also the attempts of Novgorod and the Galician Principality to exert political influence in Livonia and the Balkans, in the context and aftermath of the crusades under consideration. In 1216, the Novgorod prince Mstislav Mstislavich led Novgorod troops into Livonia as far as Riga. In a similar manner, and roughly at the same time, a civil war for the throne broke out in Bulgaria, one of the opposing parties being supported by Russian mercenaries from the Galician Principality.

Another important problem in such a comparative study is Livonia and Latin Empire as Crusader states. The considered events and processes lead to the emergence of a new political organization and significant changes in the region. There is also immediate influence on part of the neighboring states, their powers in crusading activities in the Eastern Baltic, the Southern Balkans, and Eastern Asia Minor. Some authors consider the formation of medieval Livonia and the Latin Empire, and the construction of a new feudal system. Without doubt, these
characteristics in Livonia and Romania are very specific, but at the same time, some basic parallels can be drawn, providing a basis for a comparative study of the clash between local traditions and the Western European feudal system\textsuperscript{10}.

Of crucial importance was also the role of the commercial interests in crusade activity in Livonia and Romania. Some prominent researchers analyze the role of the merchants in Livonia and Romania, and this also provides a solid basis for the comparative study\textsuperscript{11}. Unlike Livonia and Northern Europe, the Mediterranean region retained the traditions of Roman law and legal practices. What is more, the larger population on the shores and adjacent areas around the Mediterranean Sea generated a much larger volume of trade than the peoples in Livonia and the Baltic Sea. Next, unlike the merchants of the Hanseatic League, who established a solid cartel that allowed them to monopolize trade in the Baltic Sea, the Italian merchants could not afford such a course of action. Also, the significance of winter routes along the frozen rivers and lakes in Livonia in comparison to Southern and Southeastern Europe should be highlighted in such comparative research. Furthermore, based on the comparison with Venetian and Genoese trade in the Mediterranean Sea, the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov a conclusion can be drawn that the longer routes of the Italians involved more risk factors. While the longest trade routes of the Hanseatic merchants in travel and transport of goods from west-northwest to east-southeast reached 1200–1300 kilometers by sea and land, the trade routes of the Italians to the Sea of Azov reached 1900–2000 kilometers. The longer routes also suggested more risk factors in the course of trade. In this aspect, Livonia was in control of relatively shorter and more easily accessible routes, with summer


and winter options. This contributed to the flourishing of trade in that region as well as the fostering of international and domestic integration over the following centuries. It could also be pointed out that the Hanseatic merchants formed a stable cartel based on their exclusive trade privileges, effectively monopolizing trade in the Baltic Sea. Such behavior was possible only for a few decades for Venetians as a result of the Fourth Crusade. Also, Italian merchants from different cities did not share common privileges in the manner and model of their Hanseatic counterparts. Instead, Italian traders competed for trade privileges, and in the long run, this competition was settled by a de facto division of markets. The economic consequences of this Latin “thalassocracy” were expressed in the inclusion of the Balkans and the Aegean in a “subordinate” economic system in the period under question.

Last but not least comes the need for a comparative study of the clash and cooperation as a result of the crusades in Livonia and Romania during the first decades of the 13th century. Traditionally seen as sharp opposition and conflict, these crusades are increasingly the subject of a different research approach and research methodology. Many contemporary historians see Livonia and the Latin Empire not only as areas of conflict but also of coexistence and mutual influence and intertwining of different cultural identities. Next, according to some researchers of the Baltic crusades, significant demographic changes in the form of mass movements of the local tribes which mixed in a proto-national community started in the 13th c. The main factor was closely connected with the Crusades and their consequences. Indisputably, the Livonian Crusade had a terrible effect on the local population, but from another point of view, they also accelerated the process of unification of the local tribes. Besides, collisions and interactions have many other dimensions. Similarly, the Fourth Crusade resulted not only in sharp enmity but in mutual influences and the emergence of new identities and cultural models in the lands of Romania.

Thus, the proposed main problems and topics in chronological order, as specified above, provide a framework for a new and promising comparative study, for which the key purpose is to study the similarities and distinctive characteristics of the Crusades in two remote regions of medieval Europe. I hope that the final

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results will be both compelling and useful in the research of the broader topic of the Crusades – a subject which has provoked and will continue to arouse strong interest among medievalists.

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