



CRUSADER CONSTANTINOPLE'S CRUCIFIED CONSTABLE?

¿UN CONDESTABLE CRUCIFICADO EN LA CONSTANTINOPLA DE LOS CRUZADOS?

JOHN GIEBFRIED

Institut für Geschichte, Universität Wien,
john.giebfried@univie.ac.at

Abstract

This paper explores the account of a Greek lord, Michael Ducas of Epirus, crucifying the constable of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, Amedée Pofey. It argues that the account of this event in a papal letter has not received significant scrutiny, especially in relation to the unprecedented accusation of the crucifixion of one Christian against another. It explores the careers of the two figures at the center of the incident, and then builds a case against the veracity of the crucifixion claim by focusing on the frequent distortions in the letters of the Latin Emperor Henry I who is the source of this claim. It then explores a similar method of execution, the phourka, which may have been confused with or exaggerated into a crucifixion.

Metadata: Amedée Pofey, Michael Ducas of Epirus, Crucifixion, Phourka, Latin Empire of Constantinople

Resumen

Este artículo examina el relato de la crucifixión del condestable del Imperio latino de Constantinopla, Amedée Pofey, por parte de un noble griego, Miguel Ducas de Epiro. Argumenta que el relato de este evento en una carta papal no ha recibido un escrutinio significativo, especialmente en relación con la acusación sin precedentes de la crucifixión de un cristiano contra otro. Se exploran las trayectorias de las dos figuras protagonistas del incidente, y luego

se argumenta contra la veracidad de la acusación de crucifixión, centrándose en las frecuentes distorsiones en las cartas del emperador latino Enrique I, quien es su fuente. Por último, el artículo investiga un método similar de ejecución, la *phourka*, que puede haber sido confundida o exagerada con una crucifixión.

Palabras clave: Amedée Pofey, Michael Ducas de Epiro, Crucifixión, *Phourka*, Imperio latino de Constantinopla

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In the year 1210, Pope Innocent III sent a letter to Thomas Morosini, the Latin Patriarch of Constantinople. In this letter, the pope urges Morosini to try to stamp out the problem of Latin mercenaries fighting with the Greeks, both in Epirus and Nicaea.

From the letters of our dearest son in Christ the illustrious Emperor Henry of Constantinople it has become known to our see that Michael [*Dukas*] has acted in contempt of the fealty which he had pledged to the emperor, holding his men for naught, and not least breaking the oath which he had taken to this same emperor and his brother Eustace, to whom Michael had given his eldest daughter as wife. Capturing through treachery Amadeus, the imperial constable, with about a hundred knights and other men, he has had some of them flogged, shut up others in prison and wickedly killed certain of them; and, what is horrible to say, he has crucified the constable, his chaplain and three other men. Now Michael is bent on further mischief, and strengthened by the power of certain Latins, who have been blinded by cupidity and fled to him.¹

This accusation, that Michael Ducas crucified the constable of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, should shock the reader as it did Pope Innocent III. While crucifixion was used

¹ *Ex litteris karissimi in Christo filii nostri H(enrici), Constantinopolitani imperatoris illustris, nostro est apostolatui reseratum, quod Michalicius fidelitate, quam eidem prestiterat imperatori, contempta hominibus eius minime diffidatis et spreto nichilominus iuramento, quod eidem imperatori et E(ustachio) fratri eius, cui idem M(ichalicius) filiam suam primogenitam tradiderat in uxorem, prestiterat, A(madeum), imperii comestabulum, cum militibus et aliis usque centum in dolo capiens quosdam flagellavit ex eis, quosdam retrusit in carcerem et quibusdam nequiter interfectis comestabulum ipsum cum tribus aliis et capellano suo, quod est horribile dictu, suspendit in cruce. Hiis autem ad nequitiam postmodum animatus Latinorum fretus potentia, qui cupiditate cecati ad ipsum Micalicium confugerunt*, Innocent III, *Die Register Innocenz' III.*, 13. Band 13. *Pontifikatsjahr, 1210/1211. Texte und Indices*, ed. Andrea Sommerlechner, et al Vienna, 2015, 274. Translation by Graham Loud, *Letters of Pope Innocent III concerning the Fourth Crusade and the Latin Empire of Constantinople*, online: <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/history/weblearning/MedievalHistoryTextCentre/Letters%20of%20Innocent.doc>.

by Islamic rulers against Christians,² and invented accusations of Jewish ritual crucifixion are common in medieval blood libels,³ aside from this case, there is simply no other historical example of one Christian crucifying another.⁴ While the seeming uniqueness of this event should have heretofore deserved some skepticism and critical analysis, this unprecedented act has been taken at face value in every historical mention of this incident.⁵ The goal of this present study is to examine this claim with the due diligence it deserves, by exploring the careers of both the victim and the perpetrator as well as the history of crucifixion and related punishments in the Byzantine world.

1. THE CAREER OF AMEDÉE POFEY

The name of the central figure of this study has been rendered in many forms: *Ames Buffa* by the history of Henry of Valenciennes, *Nameus Bofedus* in a 1210 ecclesiastical settlement, and *Meboffa* in another papal letter.⁶ However, while the closest modern equivalent is the name Amadeus, this article will use the form he used in the charters issued in his own name: Amedée Pofey.⁷ Pofey was a knight and landowner around Lake Geneva in modern Switzerland. The earliest mention of him comes from the registers of the Bishop of Geneva in 1191, when he and his brother got into a dispute with the city's bishop. From these registers several comments can be made about Amedée Pofey's family, possessions, and links to the crusades. Amedée had a brother by the name of Guillaume, and Guillaume had at least four sons.⁸ There is a good deal of evidence about the properties and finances of the Pofey family

² See especially: Anthony 2014.

³ See: Bennett 2005, 119-139; Soyer 2021, 309-330.

⁴ It is very difficult to prove that something never happened across two millennia of history, but I have consulted dozens of scholars over a period of a decade and the only examples I have ever found are willing crucifixions done as part of devotional practices, such as are still done on Good Friday in the Philippines.

⁵ The only detailed description of his career is found in Blondel "Amédée 1947-50, 177-200. His account accepts the crucifixion account without question (p. 187); So too does every major analysis of crusader Constantinople that mentions the incident: Longnon 1949, 124; Wolff 1962, 234; Lock 2003, 140.

⁶ Henri de Valenciennes, *Histoire de l'empereur Henri de Constantinople*, ed. Jean Longon, Paris 1948, 110; *Bullarium Hellenicum Pope Honorius III's Letters to Frankish Greece and Constantinople*, William O. Duda & Christopher Schabel (eds), Turnhout 2015, 259; *Register Papst Innocenz' III*, 219.

⁷ *Régeste Genevois ou répertoire chronologique et analytique des documents imprimés relatifs à l'histoire de la ville et du diocèse de Genève avant l'année 1312*, ed. P. Lullin and C. Le Fort (Geneva, 1886), no. 510.

⁸ Blondel makes an important mistake when he says that Amedée and Guillaume had two other siblings named Amedée and Rodolphe. This he derives from a mistake made by the commentators on the registers of the bishop of Geneva. The editors associated the 'Amédée, chevalier, et son frère Guillaume' listed in this act with Amedée and Guillaume Pofey, when in actuality these two are likely two other

in the registers. From their agreement with the bishop, it is clear that Amedée and Guillaume were not nobles, but knights.⁹ They did, however, have rights in Vieu, Tolnay and Cologny and owned two houses in Geneva, valued at 810 shillings.¹⁰ As of 1208, Amedée owned a villa in Cologny, and possessed multiple tracts of land which included water rights on both the Rhone river and Lake Geneva.¹¹ Likewise his brother Guillaume, a vassal of the Lord of Gex and a witness to one of the lord's oaths, was able to give away parts of his lands in Gleis to the Abbey of Bonmont, while still giving lands to his four sons.¹² From these gifts it is likely that both of these men were well off and successful knights in their native country.

From the date of the agreement of Amedée and Guillaume with the Bishop of Geneva, 11 April, 1191, we can conclude that in all probability, neither of the brothers accompanied Conrad of Montferrat on the Third Crusade.¹³ Louis Blondel suggests Amedée may have fought with Conrad's brother, Boniface of Montferrat, in Sicily from 1194 to 1197, but his argument rests on Amedée's later affiliation with Boniface and the absence of evidence to the contrary, not any definite proof.¹⁴ Amedée Pofey did go on the Fourth Crusade with Boniface, but he appears to have been a minor player since there is no reference to him by any chronicler of the events of 1202-4.¹⁵ Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, Amedée Pofey emerges from obscurity and becomes a major player in the early history of the Latin Empire of Constantinople.

Beginning in 1208 and lasting until his death in 1210, Pofey appears again in the registers of the bishop of Geneva, and in the papal registers, and plays a significant role in the *Histoire de l'empereur Henri de Constantinople* of Henry of Valenciennes. From these pieces of evidence, we can reconstruct the career of Amedée Pofey in Greece. After serving in the contingent of Boniface of Montferrat during the Fourth Crusade, Amedée accompanied the

brothers with the same first names, because Amedée Pofey was in Greece when his act was dated. However, Blondel knew that Amedée Pofey was in Greece, but trusts the register's editors that these two are from the Pofey family. Blondel therefore assumes that because it is unlikely that one father would name two living sons Amedée, he assumes that these two are step-brothers. All of Blondel's information and the names of the possible children from these brothers should, therefore, be discounted. Blondel, "Amedee Pofey", 194; *Régeste Genevois*, nos. 516, 630.

⁹ *Régeste Genevois*, no. 454.

¹⁰ *Régeste Genevois*, no. 454.

¹¹ *Régeste Genevois*, no. 510.

¹² *Régeste Genevois*, nos. 522, 630.

¹³ Conrad and his forces were active in the Levant until he was assassinated in May 1192. Blondel 1947-50, 197.

¹⁴ He only posits this as a suggestion and provides no evidence for this claim, Blondel 1947-50, 197.

¹⁵ This may be because, aside from the poetry of Raimbaut of Vaquiras, there are no accounts of the crusade from the camp of Boniface of Montferrat.

marquis in his conquest of Greece. For his participation, he was awarded lands in Thessaly on the Aegean coast, namely Domokos, Kalydon and Gardixki.¹⁶ Around this time, Amedée Pofey became constable of the Latin Empire; it most likely happened outside Ipsala during a two-day conference between Emperor Henry and Boniface at the end of August 1207.¹⁷

In 1208, Amedée Pofey gave all his lands around Geneva to that city's bishop.¹⁸ Amedée Pofey's grant to the bishop of Geneva remains one of the most interesting moments in his career. In this agreement he gives all his lands and rights to the bishop with no stipulations about pay or penance.¹⁹ Why does he do this? More importantly why do this in a time of political unrest? Boniface of Montferrat had died in a Bulgarian ambush the previous autumn and the fate of the Latin Empire hung in the balance, as the emperor Henry was fighting both the Bulgarians and the Nicene Greeks, while still trying to hold onto the shaky loyalty of the Greeks within the empire. At this moment, the throne of Thessalonica was held by Boniface's three-year-old son, Demetrius, under the control of his mother, the former Byzantine empress and champion of the Greeks of Thessalonica, Margaret.²⁰ In such a precarious political situation it is not surprising that several of Boniface's former vassals wanted to push aside the young Demetrius and bring in Boniface's eldest son, William IV, Marquis of Montferrat. Amedée Pofey was one of these leaders. Furthermore, it appears the barons' agenda was more than just a change in leadership in Thessalonica. They were clearly unhappy with the favorable treatment of the Greeks under Boniface, Margaret, and Henry, and it is clear that they wanted to, and subsequently did, seize land and money from the Greek churches of the kingdom of Thessalonica. Finally, these rebels, likely still angry about the election of Baldwin of Flanders instead of Boniface as emperor, demanded full control over Greece from the emperor, and if they were not recognized in such a position, they declared that they would take it by force and rule independently of the Latin Empire.²¹ Clearly, the ends of such an agenda would lead to war between these barons and the Latin emperor.

¹⁶ Blondel has an excellent breakdown of his lands, how they evolved and how they related to those of Empress Margaret and the Templars, along with a map, Blondel 1947-50, 191.

¹⁷ It is also possible that the two could have met during the wedding of Henry to Boniface's daughter Agnes in Constantinople on 4 February 1207, however the text does not mention Boniface's presence, and the joy at which the two armies express in their meeting suggests that their last meeting was more likely three years ago than six months ago. Also, if Amedée Pofey was made constable around the time of this wedding, he would have likely appeared in the text of Villehardouin. Geoffrey of Villehardouin, *La Conquête de Constantinople*, in: Caroline Smith (trans.), *Chronicles of the Crusades*, New York, 2008, 123-4, 134.

¹⁸ *Régeste Genevois*, no. 510.

¹⁹ *Régeste Genevois*, no. 510.

²⁰ See Wolff 1954, 225-303; id., 1948, 33-60.

²¹ 'nous volons avoir toute la terre de Duras deschi, a la Maigre, et toute la terre l'Argut et quanques il i apent, et tout l'ille de Grece; si volons avoir Chorinthe et que Michalis et tout si baron nos facent hounage;

As mentioned above, Amedée Pofey was part of the regency council for Boniface's son and heir, Demetrius, but he nevertheless joined with the Lombard lords in Greece in trying to rebel against Demetrius, and by extension the Latin Emperor Henry. This rebellion did not go well. Emperor Henry organized a secret mid-winter march on the rebels, tricked his way into Thessalonica, and quickly captured the city, along with the leader of the rebellion, Oberto II of Biandrate. At this point, Amedée Pofey became the new leader of the rebellion and the fight continued as Henry marched south into Greece.

In the rebellion, Amedée Pofey played a key role in both the diplomatic and military sphere. As constable such a military role was not unexpected, however some comment should be made on his diplomatic dealings in this rebellion. When Henry was outside the walls of Thessalonica, the two sides each chose two representatives to try and negotiate a settlement; it was Amedée Pofey who was chosen as one of the rebel messengers.²² Likewise, he later led negotiations at Larissa and arranged with Conon of Bethune for a peace conference to be held at Ravenika.²³ His leading role in negotiations, I suspect, was because of his linguistic background. Coming from Geneva, he would have spoken some form of Old French, most likely Franco-Provençal, and thus he would be better able to negotiate with the Emperor Henry and his primary envoy, Conon of Bethune, who were Old French speakers, than would be his Italian-speaking Lombard compatriots.²⁴ Likewise, his role as constable and his language skills made him the obvious choice to lead the rebellion after the capture of Oberto of Biandrate at Thessalonica in early 1209.²⁵ In retrospect, this trust was misplaced, because as the Emperor Henry marched through Thessaly approaching the constable's own lands, and it became apparent that defeating the emperor's forces would be a difficult task, Amedée Pofey decided to seek peace with Henry in return for retaining his role as imperial constable and his fiefs.²⁶ However, none of the other rebel lords made peace at Ravenika. So, the fighting continued until the last of the lords were defeated in Greece later that year.

si volons avoir la Verre et la Ferme et toute la terre jusques a Phinepople. Se li empereres le nous otrie ensi biens le volommes caiens recueillir, et autrement non.'Valenciennes, *Histoire*, 68-69.

²² The other was the lord of Negrepointe. Valenciennes, *Histoire*, 78-79.

²³ Valenciennes, *Histoire*, 104, 107-108.

²⁴ Conon of Bethune's training as a trouvère, whose poetry includes texts sparing with the Occitan Troubadour Raimbaut of Vaqurias, would make him an ideal interlocutor with someone from a Southern French background. For more see: Conon de Bethune, *Chansons de Conon de Béthune, trouveur artésien de la fin du XIIe siècle: édition critique précédée de la biographie du poète*, ed. Axel Wallensköld, Helsingfors, 1891.

²⁵ Valenciennes, *Histoire*, 98.

²⁶ "Et Ames Buffois refu connestables en fief", Valenciennes, *Histoire*, 110.

The reasons for Amedée Pofey's abandonment of the cause of the rebellion appear to be largely pragmatic.²⁷ In the end, his decision to give away his lands to the bishop of Geneva may explain his change of allegiance. His exact intentions in alienating his ancestral lands in 1208 will never be known with certainty, but what can be said is that this act strongly suggests that Amedée Pofey was happy with his life in Greece, so much so that he had no intention to return to Coligny. Therefore, when it became clear, as the emperor's army approached his only remaining lands, that he had to make a deal so that he could keep what lands he had left, because he no longer could return home, he made his submission to Henry at Ravenika.

After the submission of Amedée Pofey to the Emperor Henry at the *parlement* of Ravenika, the imperial army marched further south into Greece, defeating the remaining Lombard rebels at Thebes, and crossing to Euboea to force the final submission of Oberto of Biandrate, ending the rebellion. During his campaign in Greece, Henry solidified his power by receiving the submission of Athens and the Morea, as well as of Michael Ducas – the later crucifier of Amedée Pofey.

2. THE SCHEMES OF MICHAEL DUCAS

Michael Comnenus Ducas was the cousin of Emperors Isaac II and Alexius III. He was appointed by Isaac and reconfirmed by Alexius as the commander of the theme of Mylasa and Melanoudion.²⁸ However, in 1201, he began his career as a serial turncoat extraordinaire, when he led a revolt against Alexius which was quickly put down, and fled to the Turks thereafter. This would be the first of eight documented betrayals! By 1204, he had returned to Constantinople, likely after the flight of Alexius III, and he had attached himself to the circle of Boniface of Montferrat.²⁹ However, at some point after the fall of Thessalonica, he fled and set himself up at Arta, marrying the daughter of the lord there, and began to fight against Boniface. In 1206, he attempted to get involved in the affairs of the Morea, but was defeated by Geoffrey of Villehardouin, nephew of the marshal-chronicler and later prince of Morea. The next year he defeated the relief crusade organized by Nivelons of Soissons outside Dyr-

²⁷ However, it should be noted that all the nobles who came to the Parlement of Ravenika: Amedée Pofey, Othon de la Roche and Geoffrey of Villehardouin, were from French-speaking backgrounds, even though the first two were vassals of Boniface of Montferrat. Perhaps their linguistic ties made them more amenable to Flemish rule than the Italian-speaking Lombard nobles. Valenciennes, *Histoire*, 107-112.

²⁸ Stavridou-Zafraka 2005, 313.

²⁹ Villehardouin, 81.

rachium.³⁰ However in the summer of 1209, while putting down the Lombard Revolt, Henry also received the submission of Michael, who gave his eldest daughter in marriage to Henry's brother Eustace. He likewise also made his submission to Innocent III the same year. In the following year, 1210, he also made a treaty with the Venetian dux in Dyracchium, and was deemed trustworthy enough to be allowed to ransom his cousin, the former emperor Alexius III and his wife Euphrosyne, who had been held in Genoa.³¹ Later the same year he led the campaign that marched into central Greece and executed Amedée Pofey.

Michael's motives for this campaign have not been clearly explained.³² However, the timeline of events suggests a possible conclusion. Almost as soon as Alexius III was freed, he left Michael's court at Arta for Asia Minor to link up with the Seljuk sultan Kaykhorau, and the two marched off to battle against Theodore Lascaris, where they were defeated at the battle of Antioch-on-the-Meander. Michael launched his attack on Greece almost simultaneously with this campaign, and Empress Euphrosyne, who had ancestral estates in just the region Michael was attacking, remained behind in Arta.³³ In that context, it seems clear that Michael and his cousin Alexius III were working together to wage a two-front war against their rivals, perhaps intending to meet in Constantinople and return Alexius to the throne, with Michael as the heir-apparent of his son-less cousin. However, when Alexius was defeated, Michael allied himself with the Bulgarian Strez, and after their defeat by the Emperor Henry, Michael once again made submission to Emperor Henry, and returned to his previous state of vassalage, albeit with a larger territorial remit. He is last mentioned in crusader sources fighting with his son-in-law Eustace and the nobles of Thessalonica against Boril and Strez at the battle of Pelegonia in 1212.³⁴ It is unclear what his relationship to the Latin nobility was after this point. Van Tricht argues he remained a more or less faithful vassal up to his assassination by a servant in late 1214 or early 1215, although there is no evidence to confirm or deny that suggestion, and the fact that we have records of him attacking the Venetians in Corfu seem to suggest the opposite.³⁵

Having considered the career of Michael Ducas, it is fair to say he is an opportunist and not a religious ideologue with his eyes fixed on holy war. Thus an act like the crucifixion of Amedée Pofey would be extremely out of character for his political career. Michael Ducas was a pragmatic leader, willing on multiple occasions to make deals with the Latin Empire

³⁰ Chrissis 2012, 28-29.

³¹ Garland 1999, 222-223.

³² Van Tricht conjectures that it was his frustrations over the dowry owed to Eustace of Flanders that led him to rebellion, Van Tricht 2011, 213.

³³ Garland 1999, 223.

³⁴ Van Tricht 2011, 186.

³⁵ Van Tricht 2011, 242

and Venice; he never committed any other such act of religious terror in his career.³⁶ Furthermore, his army was filled with Latin mercenaries—would they not object to this kind of religious violence against one of their co-religionists? Moreover, why would Michael, if motivated to commit such an extreme act, make peace so easily with Henry, less than six months later in spring 1211?³⁷ Finally, it should be noted that in 1215 when Michael's brother and heir Theodore captured the Latin Emperor Peter and Cardinal-legate John Colonna, there was no similar massacre and crucifixion. Instead, the legate was released in agreement with the Pope and Peter died in prison, and not by the hands of vengeful Greeks.³⁸

3. EMPEROR HENRY'S PROPAGANDA

There is one overriding concern that should lead historians to be more skeptical about this claim, namely that the use of crucifixion by a Christian lord carried nearly a millennium of stigma against it. Ancient authors, both Christian and pagan, agree that the emperor Constantine banned the practice of crucifixion. As with Constantine's bans on gladiatorial contests, it may have taken some time to put this into practice – however the last officially sanctioned crucifixion was of the usurper Calocerus by Constantine's nephew Dalmatius in 335.³⁹ In over a decade of research, and having consulted experts from across the world, no expert I have met has been able to point to another instance of one Christian crucifying another in the medieval world. The reasons for this are self-evident: to kill a Christian upon a cross (while it would certainly be an excruciating death) would make the victim a holy martyr, who directly bore the suffering of Christ. Even more so, to do this to a crusader, answering the call to take their cross and follow Christ, would grant them such a great spiritual reward as to supersede any suffering in death. Thus, the act of crucifixion would be counterproductive.

So, if this story seems unlikely, what is its source? It was the Latin emperor, Henry of Flanders, whose letter Innocent III referenced in his own letter to Patriarch Morosini. This original letter does not survive, but perhaps some answers can be found in Henry's other letters. There are five surviving letters sent from Henry to the West in which he discusses his military campaigns.⁴⁰ When examined as a whole these letters cast doubt on the crucifixion story told

³⁶ Nicol 1957, 24-39.

³⁷ Nicol 1957, 34.

³⁸ Nicol 1988, 378-379.

³⁹ Moreover, the strong reaction to the unsanctioned crucifixion of the king of the Alamanni in 366 by a tribune shows the punishment was all but gone by the mid-fourth century as "horrible atrocity" or even a "horrible crime." Granger Cook 2012, 245

⁴⁰ Hendrickx 1988, 7-221.

by Innocent III. In these letters there are many instances of dishonesty and exaggeration on the part of Henry or his chancery. On multiple occasions, these letters overestimated the size and power of the Latin Empire's enemies. According to one such letter the Bulgarian king Johanitsa attacked "with infinite Vlachs and Cumans"⁴¹; although later in this letter the size of the army was revised downwards to the equally unbelievable: "with more than 100,000 men."⁴² Likewise, another letter exaggerates the power and territory of Theodore Lascaris by saying he possessed "all the land up to the Strait of Saint George in Turkey."⁴³ In order to gain aid, these letters also accuse his Christian enemies of allying with the Muslims against him. He purports to have intercepted a letter of alliance between the Bulgarians and the Turks.⁴⁴ This attack, likely untrue, is especially hypocritical as Henry himself had no moral qualms allying with the Sultan of Iconium against Theodore Lascaris.⁴⁵

Beyond just working with non-Christians, these letters even accuse the empire's rivals of not being Christian themselves, for example referring to the Bulgarians as pagans.⁴⁶ Going even further, in one letter in which Henry tries to quell the rumors in France that his brother Baldwin is not dead, he goes as far as conflating Bulgarians with Saracens: "Rumors are flying across all of Flanders that Emperor Baldwin is alive and that he escaped the hands of the Saracens and quickly returned to Flanders."⁴⁷ These letters, therefore, show a pattern of distortions and exaggerations on the part of either Henry or his chancery, and cast strong doubts upon the claims of crucifixion made by the emperor in his lost letter to Innocent III and recounted in Innocent's letter to Patriarch Morosini.

Another trend in the letters of Henry to the West may shed light on the constable's fate. The most commonly recurring image in these letters is the cross of Christ. By itself, the use of the image of the cross and crucifixion should not be surprising, since he was a crusader, but the frequency of its use suggests that the image of the cross was a deeply engrained motif that Henry or his chancery used – perhaps to incite a new crusade in defense of his empire. He wrote of his rivals as enemies of the cross in multiple letters, for example: "Johanitza, the enemy of the Holy Cross,"⁴⁸ and "also all the pagans and enemies of the cross of Christ."⁴⁹ He wrote that his victories were won by his faith "in God alone and his most holy Cross."⁵⁰ In a

⁴¹ Tafel - Thomas 1857, ii, 39.

⁴² Tafel - Thomas, 1856, ii, 40.

⁴³ Prinzing 1973, 411.

⁴⁴ *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris 1887, vol 215, col. 708.

⁴⁵ Prinzing 1973, 414.

⁴⁶ Pokorny 1985, 202.

⁴⁷ Hendrickx 1970, 150.

⁴⁸ Tafel - Thomas, ii, 38.

⁴⁹ Pokorny 1985, 202.

⁵⁰ Prinzing 1973, 416.

letter to the pope he also called for a crusade to the Latin Empire “in the service of the Crucified One waiting in the land of Syria.”⁵¹ The chronicle of Henry of Valenciennes also relates how Henry took the Byzantine imperial cross relic into battle with him, and personally wore clothes that were purple and emblazoned with crosses.⁵² The fact that Amedée Pofey would be reported as dying on a cross is the sort of inflammatory statement that melds together the trends discussed above – exaggeration, attempts to de-Christianize foes, and heavy cross-related imagery. The confluence of these factors leads me to strongly suggest that the crucifixion story is most likely a grand exaggeration of the death of Amedée Pofey.

4. THE PHOURKA ALTERNATIVE

While the accusations of crucifixion must be considered heavily suspect, at best, the question remains as to whether this event was a complete invention by Henry, or if there is a kernel of truth within the myth. It is possible that Amedée Pofey, his chaplain, and the three other men were executed in a way that was similar enough to crucifixion that it could be misinterpreted as a crucifixion. There are two capital punishments that are just close enough to make this theory plausible. The first is impalement. However, while this form of execution is more well known and will be made infamous in this region by the campaigns of the Ottomans and their rivals – including, of course, Vlad III Tepes of Wallachia – it is the less likely option. Instead, the Byzantine punishment most likely confused with crucifixion was the use of the phourka (Lat. *furca*). It was a y-shaped stake to which the condemned were attached, ridiculed, and, in most – but not all – cases, subsequently executed by means of strangulation while still attached.⁵³ The law codes of Justinian, and later Leo the Wise, lay out the hierarchy of Byzantine punishments, with death by phourka and by burning alive as the two most severe capital punishments the state can impose, with beheading being considered one level below this.⁵⁴ Moreover, just as crucifixion was before it, death by phourka was the preferred punishment for the crime of treason. In the *Digest*, Justinian writes that: “A man who has deserted to the enemy and has returned shall be tortured and condemned to the beasts or to the *furca*”.⁵⁵ Meanwhile in the *Novellae*, Leo writes that: “For they [the laws concerning desertion] mean that the deserter, if at some time he should discern a resolution to repent and should wish to be healed from his previous sin by returning to his country, shall be handed over to be consumed by wild beasts or shall be suspended [on a phourka]”, and “Those guilty of treason who reveal

⁵¹ Migne, vol. 215, col. 709.

⁵² Chrissis 2012, 39

⁵³ Cook 2018, 297.

⁵⁴ Cook, 2018, 302.

⁵⁵ Cook, 2018, 301.

our counsels to our enemies are burned or attached to forks.”⁵⁶ This was also established as a means of capital punishment frequently used against enemies of the state. For example, it was the punishment handed out to the attempted usurper Kalokyres Delphinus by Basil I.⁵⁷ The best artistic depiction of execution by phourka comes from another one of these cases, the campaign of terror on Crete led by Nicetas Ooryphas, against an Islamic pirate leader and his followers, with former Christians being subject to the most extreme deaths.⁵⁸



Figure 1: Ooryphas punishes the Cretan Saracens, as depicted in the Madrid Skylitzes. Image of death by Y-shaped Phourka in center.

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Romans_\(Niketas_Oryphas\)_punish_Cretan_Saracens.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Romans_(Niketas_Oryphas)_punish_Cretan_Saracens.jpg)

In his study of Byzantine impalement, Dominik Heher makes the convincing argument that many of the executions often translated as impalements are, in fact, executions by phourka. This includes several executions within the historical memory of the death of Amedée Pofey, such as Andronicus Comnenus’ mass killing of the defenders of Nicaea, and the Normans defeated after the siege of Thessalonica.⁵⁹ It therefore seems most likely, if the story is not a complete invention, that Amedée Pofey was executed by phourka and that this was misinterpreted as a crucifixion.

⁵⁶ Cook 2018, 301.

⁵⁷ Leo the Deacon, *The History of Leo the Deacon: Byzantine military expansion in the tenth century*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot & Denis Sullivan, Washington 2005, 216.

⁵⁸ John Skylitzes, *A Synopsis of Byzantine History: 811 – 1057*, ed. John Wortley, Cambridge 2010, 148-149.

⁵⁹ Heher 2013, 148.

5. ONE CLOSING CONJECTURE

One final question remains as to why these men suffered such a horrific death, while others such as the Emperor Peter, Cardinal-legate John Colonna and the other men captured with Amedée Pofey, did not suffer the same fate. A potential solution to the quandary may be the fact that many of the troops that made up Michael Ducas' army were mercenaries. Angold argues that perhaps Michael was "unable to control his followers, who included Vlach and Albanian tribesmen."⁶⁰ However, the letter of Innocent III points to another group as the primary mercenaries in Michael's armies, one with a clear reason to single Amedée Pofey for a cruel death – dispossessed Latins. The most logical people for these Latin mercenaries to be in 1210 were disgruntled veterans of the Lombard rebellion who had been dispossessed and shut out of power when they lost the war. These men would have likely taken the quick journey to enter the service of Michael Ducas. It was Pofey who, as the acting leader of the rebellion, sold them out at a crucial moment and was rewarded for it with an imperial office. The choice to ambush and brutally kill him makes sense as a motivation for these mercenaries. The fact that the phourka was the established Greek punishment for treason and desertion, made it a fitting death for Michael to sentence the constable, to placate his new followers. To those former Lombard lords, Amedée Pofey was a traitor who deserved a traitor's death - *vae victis*.

Recibido 09.08.2023

Aceptado 11.09.2023

⁶⁰ Angold 2003, 140.

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