PREPARATIONS FOR THE FIFTH 
CRUSADE, ITS PROGRESS AND 
THE ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH 
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE 
CRUSADERS AND GEORGIA

PASIRENGIMAS PENKTAJAM KRYŽIAUS 
ŽYGIUI, JO EIGA IR BANDYMAI UŽMEGZTI 
RYŠIUS TARP KRYŽIUOČIŲ IR GRUZIJOS

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Summary

The present thesis is an attempt to investigate the details of the relationship between the Papal Curia and Georgian ruling circles through the epistolary heritage, which reflects the immediate causes of the Fifth Crusade, preparation for it and the peripeties going on in Crusade East. We decided to find out the circumstances under which the letters were sent from Georgia to Europe; to find out what kind of relationship was established with the Papal Curia; to investigate who invited the Georgians to the Fifth Crusade and when.
The best eyewitness reports about the Fifth Crusade were provided by Jacques de Vitry and Oliver in their writings; however, we could not find any direct report about the Pope calling on the Georgians for help in the battle. Jacques de Vitry does not say anything about it in an open way, though there are some indirect hints, giving ground for analysis and suppositions. There are some indications in Oliver’s reports too. In the Chapter LXXIX of the “Historia orientalis” of Jaques de Vitry Georgians are mentioned in relation to the events going on at Damietta, confirming our supposition that the attempt of the Georgians’ involvement in the Fifth Crusade began just in the period of the campaign to Egypt in 1219.

**Key words:** Fifth Crusade, notifications of Chronicler, Papal Curia, relations with Georgians, Correspondence, Campaign of Damietta.

### Santrauka

Straipsnyje analizuojamos Romos kurijos ir Gruzijos valdančiųjų sluoksnių savitarpio santykių detalės, kurias atskleidžia epistolinis palikimas, savo ruožtu, leidžiantis kalbėti apie neatidėliotinas Penktojo kryžiaus žygio priežastis, pasirengimą jam ir kryžiaus žygių į Rytus peripetijas. Mes nusprendėme išryškinti priežastis dėl kurių iš Gruzijos į Europą buvo siunčiami laiškai; išsiaiškinti, kokie santykiai buvo užmegzti su Romos kurija; išsiaiškinti, kas pakvietė gruzinus į Penktąjį kryžiaus žygį ir kada.

Geriausius liudijimus apie Penktąjį kryžiaus žygį yra palikę Jacques’as de Vitry’is ir Oliveris; vis dėlto jų raštuoše neįmanoma rasti jokių tiesioginių užuominų apie popiežiaus kvietimą gruzinams padėti kovoje. De Vitry’is nieko apie tai nesako atvirai, vis dėlto esama kelių užuominų, duodančių pagrindą analizei ir prielaidoms. Kai kurias nuorodas galima rasti ir Oliverio kronikoje. De Vitry’io veikalo *Historia orientalis* LXXIX skyriuje gruzinai yra minimi Dumjato įvykių kontekste, tai patvirtina mūsų prielaidą, kad gruzinų įtraukimą į Penktąjį kryžiaus žygį prasidėjo tik 1219 metų kampanijos į Egiptą metu.

**Esminiai žodžiai:** Penktasis kryžiaus žygis, istorinės kronikos, Romos kurija, santykiai su gruzinais, susirašinėjimas, Dumjato apgultis.

Our article is an attempt to consider the correspondence of the Roman Curia and through that epistolary heritage to clarify their relationship to the ruling circles of Georgia against the background
of the events causing the Fifth Crusade, preparation for the Crusade and the peripetiae going on in Europe and in the East. According to the famous Georgian scientists, Mikheil Tamarashvili and Ilia Tabaghua, as well as the findings and the scholarly data in the libraries and repositories of the Vatican and other European countries. In particular, the letters sent to Pope Honorius III in Rome by Rusudan King and Ivane Atabagi suggest that the governing circles of Georgia had not lost interest in the crusade to the East by the upcoming XIII century. We decided to find out the preconditions of sending correspondence from Georgia to Europe and to establish what kind of relationship existed between Georgia and the Roman Curia in those day and try to determine who invited the Georgians to participate in the Fifth Crusade and when, etc.

Although after the Fourth Crusade it could be said that Pope Innocent III expanded his ambitions to the Eastern Christendom, he was disappointed, because the conquest of Constantinople did not seem to provide an advantageous position for them in the Holy Land as the Holy Sepulcher and Jerusalem still remained in the hands of Muslims. Accordingly, in the same year of 1207, a former legate of Pope Innocent III in Constantinople, Cardinal Benedict, reported on the situation in the Latin Empire and, once again, Pope Innocent decided to concentrate his own possibilities in order to launch new arrangements for a new crusade.

It should be noted that in that period the situation in the West was not favorable for the Crusade to attract relevant attention – the Christians in Germany, France, England and Spain were busy with their own problems. Accordingly, the mystical appeal causing universal excitation in the First Crusade led to the Children's Crusade fiasco this time. While comparing the Fifth Crusade with other crusades, it can unambiguously be said that the Fifth Crusade was more a product of the Papal Curia (The Impact, 1985, 378). Pope Innocent hoped that he would inspire all the spiritual and secular leaders with this idea and its necessity, which the church faced in general at that time.
In 1215, Innocent III invited the leaders of the Christian flock to a convocation to discuss the problem of Church Reform and conquest of the Holy Land. He started active actions by referring to thousands of Christians suffering in the prisons of Muslims. Innocent III appealed to all the ecclesiastic people, kings, aristocracy, urban and rural population to equip the army as far as they could. He also urged seaports to provide the crusade army with transportation across the sea. At first, Pope Innocent sent his former school friend Robert of Courçon, to France as a legate and preacher of the Fifth Crusade. The latter had to apply to the French royal family and the clergy. Upon arrival in France, he called for the Council where they discussed so painful and problematic for France issue, due to which a substantial part of the aristocracy and clergy suffered from the impoverishment. As a result, they certainly did not show enthusiasm to support the crusade. French clergy sharply expressed their concern about the limitation of their authority by the legates of the Pope’s Curia and the heavy burden that the latter imposed on them. Phillip August supported the claims of his clergy.

Preaching of Robert of Courçon, sent to France by Innocent, was mostly successful among the masses and, therefore, could not be very effective.

He permitted all the volunteers to accept the cross: the old men, women, children, the deaf, the blind, cripples. William the Breton, a contemporary historian alleges that many nobles refused to take the cross because of the difficulties and confusion occasioned by the presence of so many ill-suited to the task of Crusade. (The Impact, 1985, 380)

In autumn of 1215, when Robert of Courçon, returned to Rome in order to participate in the fourth Lateran Council, the French prelates presented the list of their complaints to Pope, which was so extensive and well-founded that Pope was forced to ask the prelates to excuse the legate for his indiscrетion. However, strangely enough, according to the request of the
French crusaders, a new Pope Honorius III soon sent Robert of Courçon, to Palestine, as a spiritual counselor and supervisor of the French fleet, on conditions that the latter had to subordinate to the Pope's newly elected Legate, Cardinal Pelagius.

In West Germany a great number of high clerics were involved in preaching a crusade. Oliver, the scholastic of Paderborn had a leading part in it. In West Germany, crusade preaching raised a clamour among the bishops, the high church clerics and abbots. Oliveris, who was a representative of the school of Cologne, as well as a scholastic of Paderborn, played a special role in this case.

In the Fifth Crusade, Jacques de Vitry was also a crusade preacher, who was sent by Pope Honorius to the estates of Europeans living in Syria in 1217. Jacques de Vitry enthusiastically began preaching and his eloquence helped him to restore the old passion for the Fifth Crusade and inspire enthusiasm at the initial stage (Lettres, 1960, 82-134; Gogoladze et al., 2015).

After the Fourth Lateran Convocation on the 1st of June 1217 it was planned to set out. Pope Honorius sent him to preach for a new crusade to the European estates in Syria in 1217. Presumably, it was the most difficult mission since the corruption was widely spread in cosmopolitan cities Acre, Tira and Sidon, as well as the necessity to communicate in Arabic language with a lot of ethnic groups also complicated the mission. De Vitry got down to mission with enthusiasm in order to prevent uncontrollable trading interests of the seaports towards Levant, which changed the course of the fourth crusade. He fearlessly attacked the Western European population in Syria, especially Venetians, people from Pisa and Genova, who had managed to colonize Levant ports. De Vitry with his eloquence managed to restore and wake up the old passion and enthusiasm towards the Fifth Crusade in its first stage in Acre, which, after Saladin's conquest of Jerusalem, became the most important city of the kingdom of Crusaders. It should be noted that the moral situation there was unsatisfactory and there were no conditions for the arrived
pilgrims. Meanwhile, the Fourth Ecclesiastical Assembly of Lateran allowed Pope Innocent III to finalize all the details. Italian port cities – Brindisi and Messina became gathering places for Crusaders, from which the latter had to travel to the East on June 1, 1217. Innocent himself wanted to go there and bless the Crusaders on that day.

Pope and the Roman clergy vowed to provide a tithe of their income in support of the crusade. In its part, the Crusaders were exempt from all financial liability, the rents, from repayment of the debt to the Jewish creditors and were taken under the special protection of the Pope or their immediate masters until returning home. Sea trade with Muslims was to stop for four years. Finally, the Roman Curia asked the laity to make public peace for four years and to forbid tournaments for three years. All the crusaders were granted indulgence (The later Crusades, 1969, 383).

Pope Innocent appointed Jerusalem patriarch Ralph of Merencourt as a legate in Jerusalem provinces after the army of Crusaders would arrive there. While relocating the King of Jerusalem Jean de Brienne was ordered to protect Ralph of Merencourt from Saracens so that the latter could arrive in Palestine peacefully. Since, at the time, Jean de Brienne was involved in conflict with the kings of Cilicia, Armenia and Cyprus, the Pope ordered him to conclude armistice with them.

Despite such fundamental preparation, all the efforts of Innocent III did not bring much result. Naturally, the sermon, systematic campaigns, attempts of temporary truce between the secular people and the state rulers had an effect and echoed in Western Europe, but mainly in the lower classes. Military society was no longer disposed appropriately to respond to the enthusiasm of the crusade sermons about the war and did not show proper effort. Besides, no distinct leader was seen. “In the decision of the cross acceptance mostly the self-interests prevailed rather than religious motives” (The Impact, 1985, 383).
For Europeans it was already impossible to begin such a crusade as Innocent had been striving for.

After the death of Innocent III in 1216, Pope Honorius III devoted himself to implementation of the plans of his predecessor (Burchard, 378-379). Due to the existing situation in Europe Honorius could have no hopes of finding the Crusade leader in the leading European states. For example, the French nobles did not move from the West unwilling to participate in the Crusade of Germans and Hungarians, as they viewed it (Andras II and Leopold VI, Duke of Austria) (Aubrey of Trois-Fontaines, 905). The only crowned head (a monarch) of the Fifth Crusade, king Andras of Hungary left his three sons successors in case he would not return. In addition, he handed over the official rule of the country to the Archbishop of Gran, and the rule of Dalmatia and Croatia, which at that time were under his order, to the Master of the Templar Order in Hungary. In order to raise the funds, the King sold and rented his property and set off eastwards to liberate the tomb of Christ.

As it seems, the Western European monarchs and princes avoided the Crusade. However, finally Hugues de Lusignan the King of Cyprus, Andras II the King of Hungary, Jean de Brienne the King of Jerusalem and other laymen and clerics assembled in Acre. Indeed, the quantity of the crusadors was quite impressive.

Pope Innocent, the initiator of the Fifth Crusade, sent out letters calling for participation in the Crusade. However, the Georgian king is not among the addressees and the Georgians are not among the above mentioned secular and religious leaders of crusaders either. However, the correspondence of King Rusudan and Ivane Atabag (introduced to scientific circles by Tamarashvili and Tabagua) sent to Pope Honorius, where we that the king Lasha-Giorgi was going to take part in the Crusade but could not because of the Mongol invasion, undoubtedly suggests that the Georgians were getting ready for participation in the Crusade. Therefore, we decided to find out what kind of relationship the
Georgians might have to the Fifth Crusade when the Pope began appeal to Eastern Christians (if their participation in that event had been really planned) and who acted as a legate to the rulers of the Georgian state, etc.

As is known, among the eyewitnesses of the Crusade in the first third of the 13\textsuperscript{th} century de Vitry and Oliver preserved the most comprehensive statements about the East in their letters and writings, though in the works of those authors we could not find any direct allusion that the Pope appealed to Georgians for help. Although the research of the de Vitry’s works provides no immediate information about it, we still believe that they suggest some indirect allusions comparison of which to Georgian sources and the analysis of the facts can help us to make certain assumptions. We believe Oliver’s work also contain some indirect allusions. As it was mentioned, the number of crusaders gathered in Acre and the preparation carried out for the Fifth Crusade were impressive enough to expect the Crusade to be a success despite all the difficulties (Oliver, 2013, 168-170). Then the question arises when and why it became necessary to mobilize additional forces, for which the popes appealed to Eastern Christians. In our opinion, the key to this question lies in the Syrian-Palestinian futile campaign of 1217. The fact is that the uncoordinated actions, lack of the distinct leaders and general management caused no less damage to the Crusade than the hunger and aforementioned problems. Individual achievements lost significance because there was not a general action plan, and the military operations were inconsistent and uncoordinated.

The king of Jerusalem and the masters of every three Orders of the Crusade had planned to attack Al-Muazam (the son of Al-Adil the Ayyubid Sultan) immediately after mobilization of the crusade army and to direct main forces to Damietta in Egypt and then to conquer the entire Syria and Palestine. The plan was rejected by the Council of Acre, though temporarily. The Muslims’ action was also uncoordinated. Al-Adil did not agree
with his son Al-Muazam who decided to attack the Christians advanced to Esdraelon. Meanwhile, the Crusaders crossed the Jordan River and attacked the Mount Tabor. Al-Muazam had firmly fortified Tabor a couple of years before, because all the region and the roads from Jerusalem to Acre were well controlled from Tabor. In spite of Jean de Brienne’s unprecedented bravery, the first attack ended in defeat. Opinions immediately divided in the militant camp: Bohemond of Antioch was requesting an immediate retreat and he managed to gain over part of the leaders, including the King of Jerusalem. Chroniclers – de Vitry and Oliveris were criticizing Jean de Brienne and others who were in favor of the retreat. The Hospitallers and the Templars, who did not agree with this decision, attacked. However, the counter-attack with the Greek fire resulted in such heavy losses that the Crusaders raised the siege and returned to Acre. The third attack of the Crusaders appeared to be even more unfortunate than the first two. Mainly Hungarians were participating there (up to 500 people). They wanted to struggle against Muslim pillagers residing in the south and south-eastern mountainous regions of Sidon; they did not obey Balian of Sidon who was well aware of all the difficulties of the territories under his administration and the potency of brigands. The muggers attacked the crusaders near Machghara; they killed part of the crusaders and captured another part. Muslim sources name the nephew of the Hungarian King among the captured, who according to some data, was viewed as a leader of this group. A small number of survivors went back to Sidon again. Upon the return to Acre, they were caught by the heavy rains and frost in Sarepta region, where already physically exhausted soldiers died. This expedition marked an inglorious end of the Crusaders’ campaigns in 1217. Actually, the Muslims had reinforced the castle so well that it was with this expedition gloomily ended the Crusade campaigns of 1217.

Hungarian king, who had done everything in order to set off to the east and who mainly stayed in Acre, began preparations
to return to his homeland by the end of the year. On the eve of 1218, despite the threat to be cursed from the Patriarch of Jerusalem, Andras went back to Europe with his army. His departure reduced the total number of Crusaders in such a way that it became inevitable to postpone all military campaigns until the arrival of new soldiers from Europe. Crusaders were waiting for future divisions from north-west Germany and Frisia, who were travelling by the sea to Acre. They arrived in Levant at the end of spring in 1218. The leaders of the Crusades decided to run a military campaign against Egypt rather than against Palestine, i.e. to return to the plan proposed by Jean de Brienne and the masters of the Crusade Orders a year earlier. In September of the same 1218, de Vitry warned the pope that the spring was not a good time for attacking Jerusalem right away and it would be better to seize Damietta, which de Vitry called the ‘Egypt keys’, was also named as the opening of the way to other regions. De Vitry also indicated that Egypt, in addition to these advantages, was the country, which was associated to a number of biblical legends and the legend related to the adolescence of Christ; Furthermore, many of its inhabitants were Christians, who were suffering from the Muslims. Arab historian Ibn al-Furat informs us how the leaders of Crusade understood and why they wanted the crusaders to attack Egypt: “Saladin managed to conquer Syria and subjugate Jerusalem only due to the resources of the rich country, Egypt. If we take over Egypt, we will be able to easily return Jerusalem and all the property” (Michaud, 1829, 388). As we can see, the key phase around Damietta was launched in May 1218 and it is true, the Europeans managed to take it over. However, due to uncoordinated actions, they could not maintain it, despite the fact that the contingent of the crusaders was increased by Englishmen and Italians while sieging of Damietta.

It should be noted that since the end of September 1218 the crusaders fighting at Damietta received new forces from Europe including a new papal legate Pelagius authorized with
great rights. Pelagius actively participated and made decisions in military campaigns. Therefore, he was in frequent conflicts with the military leaders. Like Pope Honorius, his legate also considered the religious motive to be the only driving motivation and no other realia counted. According to their view, the Fifth Crusade was initiated by the Church and was the business of the Christian world and neither ethnic differences of the Crusaders nor the different needs, rational military calculations and material considerations had to be taken into account. The legate had endless conflict with the king of Jerusalem, while the Muslims had a rather rational proposition. AL-Kamil, the fourth Ayyubid Sultan of Egypt together with his brother Al-Muazzam and his father Al-Adil referred to the crusaders with the proposal: Muslims would leave the Kingdom of Jerusalem except Kerak (Krak de Moabitas) and Krak de Montreal (Ash Shobac) and would sign a thirty-year truce with the Crusaders, if the latter withdrew from Egypt. Jean de Brienne, French and Syrian (local Europeans) leaders endorsed this proposal. They considered the Egyptian campaign as the means to return Jerusalem and believed that this way their aim would have been achieved. However, Pelagius used all his power and authority, as well as he instigated the Italians, the Templars and the Hospitallers and achieved the rejection of the proposal, despite the fact that Sultan Al-Kamil added 30000 bezants to his proposal later on (Grousset, 1948, 235).

Vain expectation for involvement of Frederick II, the Emperor of Holy Roman Empire in the Crusade hold back Pelagius from taking any tactical steps and kept him firmly in Damietta. Due to uncoordinated actions many crusaders lost their patience and courage. Even more, some Europeans went back home.

It is difficult to decide whether Pelagius aimed at conquering the whole East, that is, whether he had long-term aims or it was just a pragmatic attitude towards the crusades at this stage. Did the Italians support his decision only because of the commercial interests (since they aspired to establish a foothold in the Delta
of Nile)? Whether it was so or not, when in the summer of 1219, after the Sultan of Egypt had defeated crusaders (who at that time were fewer in number) heavily, the Sultan repeated his proposal concerning the leaving Jerusalem in exchange for the withdrawal of crusaders from Egypt. His proposal was turned down again. In our opinion, right in such circumstances, most likely in 1219, Pelagius, who had papal permission and was granted extensive rights, asked the Georgian king to take part in the Crusade. In their letters, both Rusudan and Ioan Atabag write that Pope invited Georgians to take part in Crusade by means of his legate in Georgia and it was quite normal. Reading Rusudan’s letter we find far more information about this fact. Rusudan’s letter is not dated and does mention the legate’s name but she writes about Lasha-Giorgi’s preparation for the Crusade allowing us to make certain suppositions: “[…] From your legate in Damietta we have received your great advice and command for my brother to go and help Christians. He was eager to go and was getting ready but, as you might have heard, our country was invaded by a vicious tribe of Tatars causing great damage to our people […]” (Tabagua, 1984, 176). It should be noted that Pelagius had informed the royalty of Georgia about his permanent and exaggerated expectations for the alleged arrival of Frederick II:

We were very happy to hear that under your order the Emperor must move to Syria now to free the Holy Land. Let us know when the Emperor is going there and we will also send our commander Ivan with the whole army to help the Christians to free the Holy Sepulcher. They will come to the place you command them to come. (Idem, 176–177) – Rusudan’s letter reads.

Considering his rights granted by the Pope and the fact that all the papal legates, official preachers and even the military leaders obeyed him, we believe that in the Middle East, especially in Damietta, Pelagius must have been the only person who could invite Georgian king on behalf of Pope.
As noted above, neither in his letters nor in the History of the East (the same History of Jerusalem) de Vitry gives no immediate information about Georgians, about their participation in the Crusade and the period of participation, though in chapter LXXIX, the History of the East, talking about Georgians he writes that “the Georgians got very angry and frightened Damascus Prince Coradin because the latter let the Jerusalem wall be demolished against their will, when the Latins were reinforcing the siege at Damietta […]”(De Vitry, 1896, 83-84). Even in this source the Georgians are mentioned in relation with the course of events at Damietta that consolidates our assumption that the question of Georgians’ involvement in the Fifth Crusade must have been arisen during the Egyptian campaign.

In 1221 the Crusaders lost Damieta and left Egypt so that the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II did not even appear in the Near East. Pope Honorius III and, in general, Christian Europe blamed Frederick for the failure of the Fifth Crusade. However, it seems that the above situation and the attitudes of Western Europe did not offer the papacy many alternatives and Frederick was seen as the only future leader of the crusade. That is why he was permanently reminded to keep his promise and to fight for the Holy Sepulcher. Apparently, this is why the letter from Honorius III to Rusudan dated by 12 May 1224 reads:

[…] as for your desire to know the time when our Friedrich, Christ's favorite son, the glorious and augustissimus Roman Emperor, the king of Sicily, is going to the Crusade, we appreciate your desire and since you offer your help and participation in the fight for liberation of the Holy Lands we here let you know that the Emperor intends […] after a year of St. John the Baptist's Feast together with a great number of believers and with all their equipment, with the assistance of Christ, in a way befitting the grandeur of the Emperor.

We read the similar passages in the letter sent from the pope to Ivane Atabag dated on the same day:
In this regard, we would like to inform your nobility that what you have learnt about Christ's honored son, our augustissimus Friedrich, Roman Emperor, the king of Sicily, with respect to the Holy Lands is true. The Emperor intends to free the Holy Lands in his usual way, in a noble and generous way. Thus, sending you an apostolic letter, we note and encourage your majesty to take care of the preparation of your army according to your appreciated promise in order to be able to come to the aid of the Christian army befitting your majesty, and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ appropriately [...]. (Tabagua, 1984, 181)

In our opinion, such expectations of the Pope's Curia were encouraged by the fact that in the same period Frederick II married Jean de Brienne's daughter, the heiress to the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Iolanda of Jerusalem and acquired legitimacy to restore and strengthen the positions of the crusaders in the Near East. Indeed, in 1225, the Emperor agreed with the Pope on the condition that he would no longer postpone the crusade in 1227. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the Emperor had already been in the seaport Brindisi, he did not crusade against the East, excusing himself because of illness and the spread of the epidemic. The Papal Curia was again left in disappointment by such behavior of the Emperor and in 1227 on September 29, the new Pope Grigorius IX anathematized Fridrick II due to the breach of promise.

As is known from the history of the Crusades, finally, thanks to his good relationship with Al-Kamil and diplomatic maneuvers, Frederick II took Jerusalem (the Sixth Crusade, 1228-1229). However, in that campaign the role of the Pope's Curia was less important and, therefore, the king of Georgia received no information about participation in the Crusade. The Roman Pope Gregory IX resumed his correspondence to Rusudan later in the 30-ies of the 13th century to support the missionary activities of the Franciscans rather than the Crusades and Crusade East.
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