Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem: How Religion Drove the Voyages that Led to America

Carol Delaney
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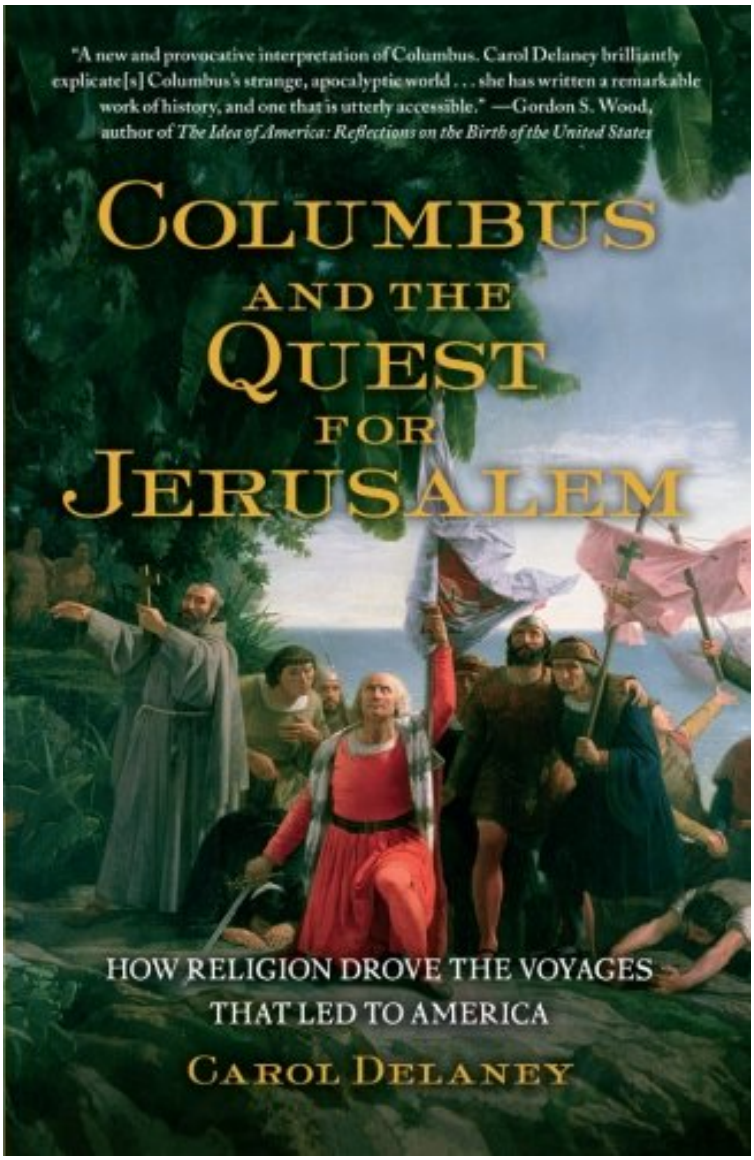

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Carol Delaney : Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem: How Religion Drove the Voyages that Led to America before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem: How Religion Drove the Voyages that Led to America:

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One of the 100 best books of the year. The Times Literary SupplementFive hundred years after he set sail, Columbus is still a controversial figure in history. Debates portray him either as the hero in the great drama of discovery or as an avaricious glory hunter and ruthless destroyer of indigenous cultures. In Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem, Carol Delaney offers a radically new interpretation of the man and his mission, claiming that the true motivation for his voyages is still widely unknown. Delaney argues that Columbus was inspired to find a western route to the Orient not only to obtain vast sums of gold for the Spanish Crown but primarily to fund a new crusade to take Jerusalem from the Muslims before the end of the worlda goal that sustained him until the day he died. Drawing from oft-ignored sources, some from Columbuss own hand, Delaney depicts her subject as a thoughtful interpreter of the native cultures that he and his men encountered, and tells the tragic story of how his initial attempts to establish good relations with the natives turned badly sour. Showing Columbus in the context of his times rather than through the prism of present-day perspectives on colonial conquests reveals a man who was neither a greedy imperialist nor a quixotic adventurer, but a man driven by an abiding religious passion. Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem is not an apologists take, but a clear-eyed, thought-provoking, and timely reappraisal of the man and his legacy.

A fascinating trawl through the 15th Century record... 5 stars * Scotsman * Brilliant. Enlightening. The surprise here is not that a vaunted academic like Delaney has written such a deeply researched take on the Columbus legacy, but that she does so with page- turning style, effortlessly transporting the modern reader into the minds and motivations of 15th- century Europe -- Martin Dugard, author of The Last Voyage of Columbus A new provocative interpretation of Columbus... By being more sensitive to the differentness of the past than most historians, she has written a remarkable work of history, and one that is utterly accessible -- Gordon S. Wood, author of The Idea of AmericaAbout the AuthorCarol Delaney received an MTS from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Chicago and is a graduate of Boston University. She is now a professor emerita at Stanford University and a research scholar at Brown University.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem CHAPTER ONE OMENS OF THE APOCALYPSE Christopher Columbus was born two years before an event that would change the world and, in large part, would set the course of his life. The fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 was a blow to Christendom from which it has never really recovered. That glorious cityhome to the Byzantine Empire for more than a thousand years and to Hagia Sophia (Church of the Holy Wisdom), Christendoms most famous churchlay in ruins, its emperor dead and its people slain or taken prisoner. When news of the sacking reached Europe, Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini, who would become Pope Pius II a few years later, described the fall of the city as the loss of one of the two eyes of the churchthe other being Rome.1 Constantinople had been a major stopping place for pilgrims en route to Jerusalem, primarily because it was the repository for a number of holy relics. Pilgrims yearned for a glimpse of objects like pieces of the True Cross; the remains of Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary; and the bones of Saint Luke, brought back from Jerusalem by Helena, the mother of Constantine I, the founder and first emperor of the eponymous city. Helena, who had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem in 326, had also found the location where Jesus had been buried and had ordered a church, the Holy Sepulchre, to be built on the site. In addition to its religious heritage, Constantinople was also home to European merchants, especially the Genoese who had come to dominate trade with the East through its outposts at ports on the Black Sea. Now, in the mid-fifteenth century, with the fall of Constantinople, the trade route to the East and the pilgrimage route to Jerusalem was virtually closed to the West. Constantinople, like Jerusalem, was in the hands of Muslims. In the struggle between Christianity and Islam, Islam seemed to be winning. Many Christians read this as a sign the end of the world was fast approaching. A pall settled over Europe. The Ottomans, however, were jubilant; they had finally captured the Kizil Elma (Red or Golden Apple) of their dreams.2 Although Muslims had been sweeping across Asia Minor for some time, the Ottomans, known among themselves as ghazis or holy warriors, had pushed the farthest. By 1326, they had reached the Sea of Marmara across which they could almost see Constantinople. They lusted after that prize not only because of its opulent buildings, its luxury and learning, and its symbolic importance, but also because of its strategic position. Strategic location of Constantinople. Map prepared by Lynn Carlson, GISP. Constantinople, todays Istanbul, is situated on hills that overlook the place where three waterways meet: the Sea of Marmara, which flows through the Dardanelles out to the Aegean; the Golden Horn, an inlet off the Marmara that divides the city; and the Bosphorus, a strait that leads up from the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea. Thus, whoever controlled Constantinople controlled travel and trade from ports in the Black Sea to those in the Mediterranean and beyond. Although the Byzantine Empire

had contracted considerably over the years to contain barely more than the city itself, Constantinople was thought to be impregnable. It was protected by miles of stone walls that were fifteen feet thick and more than forty feet high, with evenly dispersed towers that were twice as high. There were three sets of walls in all, one inside the other, each separated by a fosse or moat. These fortifications would be put to the test. Ottomans had tried several times to take the city, but had been unsuccessful. They had kept sight of their goal, however, and had made long-term plans; in preparation for the siege of Constantinople, they had conquered a huge swath of territory in Europe: from Gallipoli to Adrianople, from Varna on the Black Sea, to Greece, and then to Kosovo and Bosnia, across the Adriatic from Italy, until Constantinople was effectively surrounded. The ambitious young sultan known as Mehmet II decided that the Apple was finally ripe for the plucking. Late in 1452, he took his army of more than eighty thousand soldiers and marched from his capital in Adrianople toward Constantinople. He quartered his troops at Rumeli Hisar, a fortress his workmen had quickly constructed on the shores of the Bosphorus, a few miles north of the city walls. Rumeli Hisar, or Roman fortress, was built at the narrowest point on the Bosphorus, known as Boazkesen (throat-cutter), directly across from the Anadolu Hisar, the Anatolian fortress, built by his great-grandfather Beyazit I. From these two forts, the Ottomans could seize any ships coming from the Black Sea, collecting tariffs or confiscating their goods and capturing their crews. By the beginning of 1453 they were ready to begin the siege. In the Ottoman camps, the fires burned all night and the men were whipped into fighting mood by the beat of drums, the shrill high notes of the zurna, and shouting songs that made it difficult for people inside the city to sleep. They also set up their cannons and began an incessant bombardment of the walls in a strategy of shock and awe. The noise and vibration of the massed guns, the clouds of smoke, the shattering impact of stone on stone dismayed seasoned defenders. To the civilian population it was a glimpse of the coming apocalypse and a retribution for sin . . . [it was] according to one Ottoman chronicler, like the awful resurrection blast.3 Seeing all this activity, the Byzantines inside the city became terrified; Emperor Constantine XI wrote a desperate letter to Pope Nicholas V, promising to unify the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic churches if he would quickly send reinforcements. Although both Catholic and Orthodox were nominally Christian, their enmity was of long standing, ever since the two branches of the Church had split in the eleventh century. Unity, however, would not mean equality between the two branches, but submission of the Orthodox church to the primacy of Rome. Many Byzantines felt that was too high a price to pay for Romes support, but they were vastly outnumbered. Although the population of the city was about forty thousand, they could count at most five thousand Greek men available to fight. To be sure, there were also about two thousand foreignerssome Venetians and Florentines, but mostly Genoese who lived in Galata across the Golden Horn from the Greek part of the citybut their loyalty could not be assumed since they were Latin Christians, not Orthodox Christians like the Greeks. Nevertheless, according to a letter written to the pope by Archbishop Leonard, who had been called from Chios to help negotiate the union, the emperor and his senate had agreed to the union and it was apparently confirmed in mid-December 1452.4 For a short time hostilities thawed somewhat, if not among priests and theologians, at least among the people imperiled in the city. They celebrated when a Genoese ship arrived in January 1453 filled with food, supplies, and seven hundred soldiersfour hundred from Genoa and three hundred from their colony in Chios, an island in the Aegean. Their arrival provided a much-needed boost to morale to those in the city, especially when they learned that one of the Chian soldiers was Giovanni Giustiniani, who knew how to fortify and repair damaged walls. Knowing that his skill would be essential during the impending siege, Constantine XI, the Byzantine emperor, quickly made him his second-in-command. Some of the Genoese in Galata rushed to join and fight alongside Giustiniani, while others rushed to the ship, hoping to catch passage back to Genoa. But the majority of the Genoese in Constantinople did not want to lose the lucrative trade from their Black Sea colony at Caffa in the Crimea. Luciano Spinola, one of the leading merchants, convinced them to remain neutral in the hope that the Ottomans, like the Byzantines, would appreciate the luxury goods such as caviar and sturgeon that they supplied from that trade. Spring came; the storks returned from their winter sojourn in Africa, and the scent of roses filled the air and the churches. But these joyful signs could not dispel the unease felt by the people trapped inside the city. To add to their anxiety, at the beginning of April, Easter Week, a couple of small earthquakes rattled their already frayed nerves. For weeks, Mehmets soldiers had provoked small skirmishes along the length of the walls as a way to tire the Christians before the onslaught. For a time, the Christians had the advantage, despite their numbers. Ottoman cannon fire had damaged but not destroyed the walls, and when the soldiers tried to scale them, the Christians could knock them down with stones. Still, the continual assault and the constant vigilance had exhausted them. As an alternative strategy to breaching the walls, the Ottomans began to dig tunnels under them. The Byzantines soon discovered some of the tunnels and set fire to them, capturing soldiers and forcing them to give the locations of other tunnels. They were also aware that there were two vulnerable places along the land wallsone at the St. Romanus Gate, located in a depression caused by the Lycus River, and the other at a point where the walls met at right angles, behind the Blachernae Palace. The Ottomans decided to focus on the St. Romanus Gate because the depression rendered the towers lower than hills opposite and also because the riverbed had made it difficult to construct a deep moat. Immediately, they moved their monster cannon into place. It was twenty-seven feet longprobably the largest cannon ever constructed at the timeand could lob a stone cannonball weighing a thousand pounds against the wall or over it. Never had anything like it been seen. It demolished part of the

wall, but at night Giustiniani and his helpers were able to repair it and the assault continued. Near the Golden Horn, the Ottoman fleet was similarly stalled. Aware that their city was most vulnerable through the Golden Horn, the Byzantines had laid a huge chain boom, designed, in fact, by a Genoese, across its entrance to prevent Ottoman ships from entering and attacking both sides of the city. That was a clever strategy but hardly a panacea; they desperately needed more soldiers and supplies from Europe. The pope in Rome had dawdled in sending aid. He had assumed the city was well fortified and couldnt believe God would let it go to the infidels, and he was waiting for assurance that a union between the Greek and Roman churches would be consummated before he sent aid. At the end of March, the pope finally dispatched three Genoese ships, but they got caught in a storm near Chios and did not reach Constantinople until April 20, when they confronted a fleet of Ottoman ships and triremes. Those on land, including Constantine and Mehmet, could only watch as a vicious battle ensued. Against the odds, the Genoese sailors managed to fight off the Ottoman ships and slip through the boom that was opened for them, into the Golden Horn, where they unloaded much-needed supplies.5 This success of the Genoese greatly embarrassed Mehmet II. In response, he devised an ingenious way to circumvent the boom. In the dead of night, on April 22, the Ottomans carried out one of the most amazing military maneuvers of the time, perhaps of all time. On greased logs they rolled seventy-two ships overland up from the Bosphorus, over the hill of Galata, and down into the Golden Horn inside the boom, from where they could easily barrage the city. When the Christians awoke and saw this, they must have felt they were doomed. Yet, miraculously, they would continue to hold the Ottomans at bay for another month. On the twelfth of May, the Ottoman forces came against the palace walls with thousands of soldiers and, according to Nicol Barbaro, an eyewitness, these Turkish dogs let loose with fierce cries according to their custom, and with sounds of castanets and tambourines . . . they made a strong attack against the walls of the palace, so that the majority of those in the city thought that night that the city was lost.6 Yet the Christians clung to their belief that God would not allow the city to fall to the wicked pagans, at least not until a prophecy, attributed to the first Constantine, was fulfilled. He had prophesied that the city would never fall until the moon rose darkened, and since that had not yet occurred the people inside the city continued hopeful. Two weeks later, however, their hope ran out. On May 24, there was a lunar eclipse, followed by torrential rain, fog, and a strange light that hovered over Hagia Sophia. Among the terrified citizens a rumor spread that the time of the Antichrist had arrived, meaning that the end of the world was nigh. In the Bible, the Antichrist is identified as a powerful leader who will come in the last days to tempt people away from their faith.7 A huge battle will ensue, the Antichrist will be defeated. Christ will come again to judge both the quick and the dead, and the world will end. For the people in Constantinople, it was easy to imagine that Mehmet was the Antichrist and that the end-time was upon them. At this crucial moment, Mehmet tempted Emperor Constantine with terms of surrender. Constantine refused, and summoning the people to Hagia Sophia, he warned them that the great battle for the fate of the world was imminent. He told them that they should be ready to die for their faith, their country, their family, and their sovereign. Encouraged by his words, Greek and Latin Christians united against their common enemy, the Muslims. After taking communion together, the men went back to their posts, and the women carried water to refresh them and collected stones for them to rain down upon the enemy. On the night of May 28, after fifty-four days of continual siege, the Ottoman camp was deathly quiet. The Greeks hoped against hope that the Ottomans had given up. But at dawn, when the sun was shining directly into the Christians eyes, the elite Janissary corps8 of the Ottoman forces stormed the walls and a ferocious battle ensued. Still, the Christians held on. When the emperor saw that his commander-in-chief was missing, he went in great distress to see where he had gone and learned that Giustiniani had been wounded by an arrow and had left his post on the ramparts. When he found him, he pleaded, I beg you; your flight will encourage others to do the same. Your wound is not mortal; bear the pain and stay at your post like a man, as you promised to do. But Giustiniani fled, and as he fled, he went through the city crying the Turks have got into the city!9 Hearing this, many of the people panicked and abandoned their posts to follow him, hoping to escape on the ships. Many later believed that had he remained, their city might not have been lost. Constantine and his men continued fighting bravely. It is said that the emperor, proclaiming he would rather die fighting for his city than live among the infidels, dismounted his horse and joined the fray. He was last seen, sword in hand, disappearing into the crowd. Not long after his disappearance, the wall was breached. Ottoman soldiers swarmed in and soon their banner flew from the ramparts. The city had fallen to the Muslims. The date was May 29, 1453. Later in the day, Sultan Mehmet, forever after known as the Conquerer, rode directly to Hagia Sophia and entered the church. He was awed; never had he seen such a building. It was the largest enclosed space in the world, and the dome was more than 184 feet from the floor (about fifteen stories high) and 102 feet wide. Instead of the customary solid walls, there were windows in the dome that flooded the interior with light. Built in the sixth century, the domes construction was unsurpassed in Europe for nearly one thousand years; it seemed to float in the air, compelling a close associate of Mehmets to write that it vies in rank with the nine spheres of heaven!10 Mehmets personal cleric mounted the pulpit and recited the Muslim creed: There is no God but God and Muhammad is his prophet, thereby transforming the church into a mosque. Hagia Sophia would henceforth be called Aya Sofya (a Turkish rendering of the Greek name). Because human images are not permitted in mosques, the golden mosaics and colorful frescoes depicting Jesus and the saints would soon be defaced or covered over.11 The damage to the building, and to the city, is said to have saddened

Mehmet and caused him to meditate on the transitory nature of all things, but he could not deny his soldiers, who had been fighting for months, the three-day rampage permitted under Muslim law if a city does not surrender. A Christian eyewitness sent a grim report to a cardinal in Florence, who then sent a letter to the mayor of Venice describing Constantinoples terrible fate: The public treasure has been consumed, private wealth has been destroyed, the temples have been stripped of gold, silver, jewels, the relics of the saints, and other most precious ornaments. Men have been butchered like cattle, women abducted, virgins ravished, and children snatched from the arms of their parents. If any survived so great a slaughter, they have been enslaved in chains so that they might be ransomed for a price, or subjected to every kind of torture, or reduced to the most humiliating servitude.12 The Christian dead totaled about four thousand, many more were wounded, and tens of thousands were taken prisoner. Blood flowed in the streets of Constantinople, encircling the cobblestones like red mortar. Some of the bodies were thrown into the Dardanelles, where they floated out to sea like melons along a canal.13 Others were piled up as there had been no time to bury them; the stench was terrible, but even more terrible was the task of identifying the bodies of friends and relatives, because many had been beheaded. In the city, the Byzantines blamed the Latins, alleging that Because we made the Union, and paid attention to the Pontiff of Rome, we deserve to suffer the displeasure of God. In turn, the Latins thought the fall of the city was due to the stubbornness and iniquity of the Greeks, whom they compared to a body which had remained for so many years cut off from its Head,14 and who, it was believed, had feigned the union. The chasm between the two wings of the church was dug even deeper. Now, more than two-thirds of the land around the Mediterranean was in Islamic hands and the Muslims had a firm foothold in Europe. Yet, even upon hearing of the carnage at Constantinople, Christians did not rally to the cause when Pope Nicholas V immediately called for a new crusade; they were not enthusiastic contemplating the realization that they would first have to conquer Constantinople if they were ever to conquer Jerusalem. Nor did they rally when the Ottomans encroached closer to European cities and attacked Belgrade in 1456. Europeans were exhausted from the Hundred Years War between England and France and from a number of other internecine wars. Despite the apocalyptic mood, they needed a rest. With their forces depleted, there were too few men to commit to a distant war. The lack of enthusiasm for a new crusade was a sign of the hopelessness of the times. In contrast, three and a half centuries earlier when Muslims had destroyed the Holy Sepulchre, armies from all over Europe answered Pope Urban IIs call for the First Crusade in 1095.15 Their fervor was aroused by the belief that Jerusalem belonged to them; its reconquest was legitimate. As the rightful owners, they believed they had to liberate the city and cleanse the sacred places. In the late eleventh century, frequent recitations of Psalm 79:1O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritancethy holy temple have they defiled, they have laid Jerusalem in ruins, helped to stir the passions of medieval Christians.16 That fervor, however, had a dark side. Crusaders traveling from all parts of Europe planned to meet in Constantinople, but their religious justifications and lofty ideals did not prevent them from committing terrible crimes against the Jews in response to a rumor that it was the Jews in Jerusalem who had urged the Muslims to destroy the Holy Sepulchre. In cities such as Mainz, Speyer, Worms, Trier, and Cologne, they tortured or simply massacred any Jews who refused to convert. For some Jews, death was preferable to apostasy, and chronicles, liturgies, and poems of the time record that quite a number killed themselves and, in reference to the biblical Abraham, sacrificed their children before the crusaders could get to them.17 More than twenty thousand crusaders converged on Constantinople between 1096 and 1097. In order to avoid conflict in the city, the Byzantine Emperor Alexius sent the crusaders to an encampment on the other side of the Sea of Marmara, where their first successful assault was the retaking of Nicaea from the Muslims. Nicaea is the town where the Nicene Creed, the Christian confession of faith, had first been articulated in A.D. 325. Confidently, the crusaders began marching toward Jerusalem, yet their mood quickly deflated when they reached the arid stretches of the Holy Land and found little water or food. They were in no shape to go into battle. Fortunately, as they were marching overland, the Genoese had sent a fleet of twelve galleys, one ship, supplies, and twelve hundred crusaders, and they reached Jaffa, the closest port to Jerusalem, just as the northern Europeans arrived on foot. Thus fortified, the crusaders attacked Jerusalem and conquered it on July 15, 1099. But again the crusaders were ruthless. Once inside the city, they massacred Muslims and Jews alike. Still, Christians back home praised them for having purged with swords of piety the place and house of heavenly purity from the filth of the impious.18 Following their successful capture of the city, the Franks, as all Europeans in Jerusalem were called, established the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem and restored the Holy Sepulchre and other places related to the life of Jesus. They also established a number of other crusader states in the LevantEdessa, Antioch, Acre, and Tripolibut there was little peace. The princes of those states fought each other constantly, and the kingdom of Jerusalem often required reinforcements from Europe for support in its ongoing battles with its Muslim neighbors. Despite European aid, the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem did not survive a century. One by one, crusader forts fell to Saladin, the Muslim conqueror, and by October in 1187, after a short battle, Jerusalem surrendered to him. Saladin wasnt interested in destroying Christian holy places. Instead, he appointed Franciscans to guard the Holy Sepulchre, permitted the Knights Hospitaller, a monastic order founded before the crusade, to continue their aid to any poor and sick pilgrims still brave enough to make the journey, and allowed the aristocratic, military group known as the Knights Templar to protect them. After the expending of so much energy on the crusade to take Jerusalem, the loss was devastating to European Christians. Pope Urban III died shortly after

hearing the shocking news. It was said that King Henry II remained speechless for four days, and King William II of Sicily donned sackcloth and sat in solitude for four days. Cardinals became itinerant preachers, and people flocked to churches that remained open day and night.19 As scholar Raffaele Pazzelli notes, Large paintings were made which depicted the Holy Sepulchre trampled upon by horses and Jesus Christ oppressed by Mohammed . . . and minstrels abandoned their love songs to weep over the enormous tragedy.20 The surrender of Jerusalem created a stain on the hearts of European Christians; they were ashamed, and many blamed the Franks for fighting among themselves and for not fighting harder to defend their city. They also grappled with the theological question: How could God have allowed the city to return to the infidels? The most acceptable explanation, articulated early on in a letter a Genoese merchant had sent to the pope following the surrender, was that God was punishing them for their sins. The new pope, Gregory VIII, sounded the same theme in his encyclical published shortly after he received the news of the loss: Having heard of the severity of the terrible judgment which the divine hand had used over the land of Jerusalem, both we ourselves and our brothers are so confused with horror and afflicted with such sorrow, that it is not easy for us to discern how we are to act or what we are to do.21 He commanded the faithful to repent of their sins and do penance. According to Pope Gregory, God had used the Muslims as a goad to inspire the Christians to change their corrupt ways so that, with cleansed hearts, they would renew the fight for Jerusalem. Their salvation was to be in the future. With the proclamation of this mission, the meaning of Jerusalem changed. No longer was it only the earthly city where Christ had walked and had been crucified, it had become the site of his Second Coming, the site of the Last Days as prophesied in the Gospels, the book of Revelation, and elsewhere in the Bible. Belief in the impending Apocalypse had stirred friars and priests to redouble their efforts at conversion. In the mid-thirteenth century, a couple of Franciscan friars, John de Plano Carpini and William of Rubruck, journeyed to Central Asia on evangelical missions to convert the Grand Khan in the hope that he would become an ally of the Christians in their fight against the Muslims. Although the khan wanted to learn more about Christianity, he had a more ecumenical approach to religion and could not believe there was only one faith; the friars were unsuccessful in their conversion efforts. The desire to convert the Grand Khan was also part of the motivation for the 1271 journey in which seventeen-year-old Marco Polo accompanied his father Nicol and his uncle Maffeo to the kingdom of the khan at Cathay in order to fulfill a promise they had made on a previous journey. Because of the khans interest in Christianity, he had asked them to bring a vial of oil from the lamp of the Holy Sepulchre. He had also sent a letter with them to Pope Gregory X, requesting that he send a hundred priests who could instruct him and his people in the Christian faith. On their return journey to the Mongol kingdom, as recorded in The Travels of Marco Polo, they carried the holy oil and some presents and letters from Pope Gregory X to Kublai Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan. But the few priests who were willing to accompany them soon turned back because of the rigors of the journey. Kublai Khan was sorely disappointed; Marco commented that if the Pope had sent out persons duly qualified to preach the gospel, the Great Khan would have embraced Christianity, for which, it is certainly known, he had a strong predilection.22 During the thirteenth century, eight more crusades had been launched, none of them successful. All left a path of destruction in their wake, but, with the exception of the First Crusade, none was as terrible as the Fourth Crusade. When the crusaders reached Constantinople, they decided to support the young Prince Alexios to depose his uncle Alexios III and install young Alexios as the lawful ruler. But when the prince was unable to pay them as he had promised, the crusaders rebelled and attacked the city with weapons that were meant to be used against Jerusalem. The Latins slew their fellow Orthodox Christians without mercy. In April 1204, the greatest city in Christendom was full of smouldering ruins; its palaces and the great houses of its leading families had been pillaged, their hangings and glorious wardrobes torched, their roofs gutted by fire. Entire libraries and archives of documents within, if not already burned, were exposed to rain and would become food for insects and rodents. Many of the revealing small objects of daily life, from tools to kitchenware, icon corners and prayer books, accumulated over hundreds of years, were smashed and broken.23 Even Hagia Sophia did not escape destruction; in addition to their looting, the Latin Christians desecrated the church by having a prostitute sing and dance in front of the altar. Much of the booty from the sack of the city now resides in the West, including four monumental gilt horses that had stood atop a column at the ancient Hippodrome where Byzantine emperors had watched chariot races and other major public events. Those horses were taken to Venice, where they stand on pedestals in front at St. Marks Cathedral. The crusaders never continued on to Jerusalem; instead, for the next fifty-seven years, the Latins occupied the city until the Byzantines, under Michael Palaiologos, took it back in 1261. The Fourth Crusade wreaked more destruction on Constantinople than the Ottomans would in 1453 and was not forgotten. During the Ottoman siege, it is no wonder that the Byzantines were wary of the Latin Christians, some even going so far as to claim that they would rather see the turban of a Turk than the hat of a cardinal in their city. By the beginning of the fourteenth century the major crusades had ended, yet Latin Christians never gave up the idea of a crusade, and their desire for Jerusalem would be revived over and over again.24 The crusades did more than stoke religious fervor in Europe, they also helped foster trade in the Eastern Mediterranean. Those involved in transporting crusaders and supplies to the Levant, particularly the Venetians, Genoese, and Pisans, also developed trade routes and trading partners throughout the area, picking up spices, grain, medicines, perfumes, and other goods for the return journey. For their services, these groups were given merchant quarters in Constantinople, Jaffa, Acre, and Jerusalem

among other cities. Genoese ships, for example, had sailed to ports on the Black Sea, along the Turkish coast and Aegean islands, to the Levant, Egypt, and as far west as Ceuta in North Africa. By 1298 the Genoese passed through the Pillars of Hercules (the Strait of Gibraltar), after defeating the Moroccans who had controlled them, and thereafter they traded from ports in the Black Sea all the way to their outposts in Lisbon, Seville, Flanders, Bruges, and Southampton. Genoese Trade Routes. Map prepared by Lynn Carlson, GISP. This type of long-distance trade was greatly aided by the invention, around 1270, of the dry compass. Instead of a magnetized needle floating in water or attached to a pin, methods that had been used until then, the newer one was set in a wooden box onto which compass points could be marked. Knowledge of the relatively calm and well-traveled waters of the Mediterranean was passed from sailor to sailor and plotted onto portolanicharts drawn with fairly accurate outlines of coasts and directions from place to place taken from compass readingswhich were compiled in a pilot book known as Compasso da Navigare and included distances from port to port, information about landmarks, depths of water, and dangers. With portolani, a sailor could both plot his direction and find it, even in cloudy weather, which meant that ships were no longer confined to sailing only in summer. Likewise, changes in ship design also facilitated long-distance trade. Galleys, the oared vessels that had conducted most of the Mediterranean trade and transport, required too many men to row, leaving little room for cargo. They were also too low in the water to easily ward off attackers. Ships for carrying crusaders were designed with higher hulls that made it easier to defend against attacks. Powered by sails, and with only a few side oars at the stern for steering, they required smaller crews. Thus, they could carry more soldiers and, later, pilgrims in addition to supplies and even horses. Other innovations would be introduced in the fifteenth century, including a single rudder attached to the sternpost that was manipulated by a lever, making ships easier to steer. In Sagres, Portugal, Prince Henry the Navigator (13941460) had begun the study of navigation and of ocean currents and winds, and would introduce the caravel, a lighter ship that would become an optimal vessel for exploration. Prince Henry then began to encourage voyages to the Madeiras, the north coast of Africa, and eventually down its western coast. But just as this trade and innovation were flourishing, and towns in Europe, especially the Italian city-states, were growing in size and prosperity, the Great Famine of 1315 struck. Shortly thereafter, the Great Pestilence (bubonic plague) decimated the European population and wiped out the rest of the regions recent gains. The origin of the plague that spread like wildfire throughout Europe in the mid-fourteenth century is still being debated. One theory attributes the spread to an early act of what today might be considered biological warfare. Tartar traders traveling along what became known as the Silk Road to the Genoese trading outpost at Caffa on the Black Sea began to die at an alarming rate. When their caravans reached Caffa, there were few men left to wrest the trading post from the Genoese as they had hoped. So instead of fighting, they threw the dead and diseased bodies over the city walls in the belief that whatever had killed their own men would spread and kill the Genoese as well. Though the Tartars failed to take the outpost, they were very successful in unleashing one of the worlds greatest disasters. It is thought that in 1347, a Genoese ship left Caffas port carrying its usual cargo of silks and spices along with its usual accompaniment of rats and their fleas. But the fleas onboard this ship had feasted on the diseased bodies of the Tartars. At every port, the fleas jumped ship, first at Constantinople, then at other ports in the Mediterranean, including Genoa. From each port the bubonic plague spread rapidly inland until all of Europe was affected. At the time, people didnt know that a tiny flea bite was the cause of their high fevers, headaches, and nausea. The victims were also stricken with painful buboesswellings the size of an egg or applethat appeared in the groin, neck, or armpit. When the buboes oozed pus and blackened over, death came quickly, usually within the week. A particularly virulent form of the plague spread through the air; if it lodged in the lungs, a person could die within three days. So many dead meant mass burials. Boccaccio, who survived the plague in Florence, wrote a gruesome description of it in the introduction to his Decameron. There were so many bodies, he wrote, that a huge trench was dug, and as the bodies, hundreds at a time, arrived, they were piled up as merchandise is stowed in the hold of a ship, tier upon tier.25 Those who survived worried about the souls of their dead relatives and friends. Since many of the clergy, especially the monks who often cared for the sick, also succumbed to the disease, there was often no one left to take victims confessions and perform the last rites so that their souls might rest in peace. Though people were unaware of the source of the terrible disease, they had a number of ideas, typically focused on religious motives, to explain it. As with the loss of Jerusalem in 1187, many people believed the plague was Gods punishment for their sins, a belief that inspired a number of penitential movements. A venomous theory blamed beggars, lepers or, more often, the Jews, whom people claimed had poisoned wells and were therefore responsible for spreading the dread disease. This rumor led to the torture and burning of hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Jews. The Great Pestilence, as it was called at the timeBlack Death being a much later termswept across Europe between 1347 and 1348. Because of the paucity of accurate records and lack of information about family size and population, the following can be read only as estimates. Regardless, the figures are stunning; it is thought that the plague killed more than a third of the population, yet that figure is only an average. In some Italian and Spanish cities on the Mediterranean, it is thought that approximately 75 percent of the people died; Florence lost half its population, while Germany and England had the fewest deaths, with an average of about 20 percent. The Great Pestilence took the lives of between 25 and 50 million people.26 Although the worst of the plague was over by 1350, it did not disappear.27 Outbreaks could occur at any time, and did so for more than a century, which intensified the general sense of unease

about the imminence of the Apocalypse. It seemed that the signs were there for those who had eyes to see, for Jesus had explicitly warned in the Bible: Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven. (Luke 21:1011) Aware that people were desperately seeking an explanation for the terrible events of the fourteenth century, at the beginning of the fifteenth mendicant friars of the Franciscan and Dominican orders roamed through France, Italy, and Spain, preaching the Apocalypse. Their fiery sermons mesmerized people by warning that the Antichrist could come at any moment, and that he would reign for three years. But Christ would return and defeat him; all people would be evangelized and, to save their souls, would be converted. Forty-five days later, the world would end. The emphasis on conversion had become acute for, by the fifteenth century, the idea that there could be no salvation outside of the church (extra ecclesiam nulla salus), stemming from a bull by Pope Boniface VIII in 1302 and reinforced at the Council of Florence in 1442, had become the canonical view. Although some clergy and laypeople doubted that a just God would allow all the good people who had never heard of Christs saving word to burn eternally in hell, their views did not prevail.28 The friars aim was conversion of Jews and Muslims, but in Spain the pressure to convert became focused especially on Jews. Although Jews had long lived and prospered in Spain, they were ever reminded that their continued residence was at the kings pleasure. Las Siete Partidas, the law code compiled by Alfonso X in the thirteenth century, stated that Jews should live in subjection to remind them of their role in Jesus crucifixion. According to the Spanish friars and priests, because Christ had come to free all people from original sin, the Jews refusal to be freed was more than obstinate; they were assumed to be under the power of the Devil.29 After the plague, efforts to convert Jews intensified and as passions were stirred, many were killed. Mass baptisms took place, and it is believed that more than half the Jewish population converted. Baptism was believed to be transformative, so little or no instruction in Christian belief and practice was provided. Many of these conversos, as converted Jews were called, rose to high positions in the Spanish government and even in religious orders, but others became suspected of reverting to their old practices in secret. Muslims, too, were targeted for conversion, but the animus toward them was less than that against Jews, perhaps because they had no alleged role in Jesus death. Also, they were less involved than the Jews in the life of the big cities, and therefore less visible than the Jews. However, though the Spanish did not aggressively persecute Muslims in their realm, they did aggressively go after the Muslim territories that were at one time held by Europeans. The campaign was called the Reconquista, and by the fifteenth century most of the land the Muslims had conquered in the eighth and ninth centuries had been reconquered by the Spanish. The one exception was Granada, and that would come under attack later in the century. During the same period, religious ire was directed not only against Jews and Muslims but was also expressed within the Catholic Church itself, due to a critical division of the papacy. This split in the church, known as the Great Schism, was seen as another sign of the impending Apocalypse. From 1305 to 1377, the papacy had moved its seat to Avignon because of unrest in Rome, but accusations of corruption in Avignon and submission to the French king led supporters of the Roman seat to refer to this period as the Babylonian Captivity of the Church. In 1378, Pope Urban VI returned the papacy to Rome and a new pope was elected; whereupon Catholics in Avignon elected another. Thus, there were two popes. This dilemma threw the Church into disarray and divided Europe into factions. Finally, the schism was resolved during three years of debate (14141417) known as the Council of Constance. One of the attendees was Pierre dAilly, whose Imago Mundi would be avidly read and annotated by Columbus. DAilly was a respected theologian, a cardinal, and rector of the University of Paris, who wrote extensively about the schism, suggesting that it might be a sign of the imminence of the Antichrist. That may have moved the council to resolve the crisis; it eliminated the claimants, elected a new pope, and declared that Rome was henceforth to be the true seat of the papacy. Yet the Avignon contingent did not relinquish its position easily, and the popes they elected came to be called antipopes. Just before Constantinople fell to the Muslims, Avignon finally surrendered their claims to the papacy. The conquest of Constantinople in 1453 represented the capstone to all of these turbulent events that had been rocking Christianity for four centuries. The citys long history would be encapsulated, like bookends, between the two Constantinesthe founder and Constantine XI, its last emperor. With the fall of Constantinople, Muslims now controlled the overland pilgrimage route to Jerusalem, and the city of Jerusalem itself. The loss of the holy city, and then Constantinople, had shattered Christians once ebullient hopes of unifying the worldunum ovile et unus pastorand turned them introspective; the plague had devastated Europe and was still a threat; and the schism in the church had left deep scars that had not yet healed. Something was clearly wrong with the world; infidel Muslims seemed to be in the ascendant. No wonder the tenor of the time was apocalyptic. This was Columbuss world, and the heritage of these tumultuous events would shape his life and his understanding of the ultimate meaning of his voyages and discoveries.