Ruling east, but looking west

An analysis of the role of cultural identity on the election of Emperors in the Latin Empire of Constantinople

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Context

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Preface: The Latin Empire of Constantinople
On the 13th of April 1204, western soldiers achieved the impossible; they stormed, sacked and captured Constantinople. The victorious crusaders tried to set up an empire, what we now call the Latin Empire of Constantinople, in a land that was completely alien to them. They brought with them their own culture, their own western perspective which clashed with the Byzantine, Greek culture. The Greek elite saw the westerners as Frankoi, Franks, uncivilised barbarians. Soon three Byzantine centres of resistance sprung up: in Trebizond, Epirus and Nicea. The latter two would try to take back Constantinople at all cost. To survive, the westerners would have to learn how to settle in and adapt to their surroundings. They would also need great leaders to guide them through these troubled times.

However the Latin Empire of Constantinople didn’t survive. In 57 years it slowly declined, until there was only Constantinople left which the Byzantines took back in 1261 as well. Why weren’t these Franks able to permanently settle their empire, to make it a part of the Mediterranean context? ‘By all means their emperors didn’t help, with one exception they ranged from bad to mediocre. In such a competitive rich environment a good ruler can make quite a difference. It is my believe that the cultural identity of the Franks played a large role in the selection of new emperors, and this had a debilitating effect on the empire.

This study assays this believe by researching in what way the influence of cultural identity on the Franks of the Latin Empire of Constantinople did affect their choice of emperor. Therefore my research question will be as follows:

In what way did the influence of cultural identity on the Franks of the Latin Empire of Constantinople affect their choice of emperor?

In the first chapter I will investigate how the identity of the Franks developed from late antiquity to the Central Middle Ages. The second will look at the interaction between the Frankish and Greek culture. The third will focus at how the six emperors of the Latin empire were chosen and what role their cultural identity played in it. These chapters will be followed by a conclusion. This investigation will be carried out by studying secondary literature, the works of which will be discussed in the Status Quaestionis.
Status quaestionis.
Compared to the other kingdoms and empires in the region, there is a relative lack of good sources on the Latin Empire of Constantinople. There are only three narratives from the empire itself and none of them extend past 1216. Geoffrey of Villehardouin (1160-1212), an important crusading baron, chronicles the events of the fourth crusade in 1204 leading up to the death of Boniface of Montferrat in 1207.¹ Henry of Valenciennes (?-1216), as clerk to the second Latin Emperor Henry of Flanders, takes over in 1208 and stops in 1209.² Robert of Clari (1170 - après 1216), a mere knight, keeps the narrative going from 1204 until 1216, even though he left for France in 1205.³ All three of these sources are mostly interested in political and chivalric history. From 1216 on there are nearly no sources from the Latin Empire itself, besides documents of diplomatic relations with the papacy, Venice, France and other countries. The chronicle of Morea recounts some stories about the Latin Empire, but those stories are mostly legend and unreliable. There are some Greek sources that discuss the Latin Empire, but one must keep in mind that these are always hostile to the Franks.

The secondary literature is also not very expansive. Byzantinists don’t regard it as part of their field because of its Latin character and western medievalists ignore it because it was centred in Constantinople. Recently however, there has been some renewed academic interest in the subject. The last narrative work on the Latin Empire was in 1949, Jean Longnon’s (1887-1979) L’empire latin de Constantinople et la principauté de Morée.⁴ This work is a useful summary on the events between 1204 and 1261, though Longnon focusses mostly on the years between 1204 and 1230. Longnon also wrote Les compagnons de Villehardouin : recherche sur les Croisés de la quatrième croisade in 1978, a helpful overview on the men that went on the fourth crusade, and their background.

Robert Lee Wolff (1915-1980) a Harvard history professor, never wrote a book on the subject, but some of his essays were collected in a single volume.⁵ In them he gives detailed descriptions of the inner workings of the Latin Empire and its participants, such as the papacy, the podesta of Venice and the relationship of Baldwin with his county of Flanders. His work was predominantly political in nature and he always involved Europe in his research. In his view the Franks of Constantinople derived their identity from mainland Europe and they never severed their Frankish ties. For instance, his essay on Baldwin of Flanders recounts the

intimate relationship Baldwin had with his people and how they loved him so much they were willing to support an imposter twenty years after his death.

David Jacoby is a professor emeritus of medieval history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and he wrote extensively about the social dimensions of the Latin Empire, mostly from the view of the Venetians and the Greeks. According to Jacoby the Franks held onto their traditions and ties of kinship when they settled in former Byzantine territories. These knights transplanted their feudal rules and traditions to their new lands and they also kept in contact with their land of origin. Despite incorporating some Byzantine elements in their rule, the Franks would hold onto their Frankish identity until their eventual expulsion. However, they would be a minority in their own lands, so some adaptation and intermingling could have happened.

Peter Lock, a professor on the faculty of arts in Leeds, wrote The Franks in the Aegean: 1204-1500 analysing the governments of the six different Latin states in the Aegean from 1210 on. The social, economic and cultural aspects of these Frankish territories were examined, together with their relationships to their allies, enemies and Greek subjects. Lock states that the Franks held unto their Frankish identity, despite their long stay (the last Latin holdout would be conquered by the Turks in 1718) they would never assimilate into a Franko-Greek culture. The Franks dominated their lands and didn’t interfere much with the daily lives of the lower Greek classes.

Filip van Tricht, a historian of the University of Gent holds an opposing viewpoint to Lock. In The Latin “renovatio of Byzantium: The Empire of Constantinople (1204-1228) he argues that the Franks cultivated ties with the Greeks, that they took over political institutions from the Byzantine court and that they cooperated a great deal with the many prominent Byzantine families that stayed in Constantinople after its fall in 1204. Van Tricht tries to remediate the poor reputation of the Latin Empire and he argues that Latins tried to continue and reconstitute the floundering Byzantine Empire by combining Latin and Greek elements.

The latest contribution in this discussion is by Erica Jo Giles, a professor of history at Princeton University. In her dissertation Nova Francia?: Kinship and identity among the Frankish Aristocracy in Conquered Byzantium 1204-1282 from 2010, she argues that the

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Franks in the Latin Empire developed a frontier identity. This means that the Franks were always in close contact with other cultures, like the Greeks, Bulgarians and the Turks. This, coupled with the constant threat of destruction hanging over their heads, meant that the Franks underwent a change in their identity, the result of which was neither Frankish or Greek. Baldwin II’s attempt to marry one of his nieces to a Turkish sultan would be a prime example of this. The people of western Europe were appalled at the idea of marrying a Christian into a Muslim house, but to the Franks in Constantinople it was a necessary act to ensure the safety of the Empire.

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Chapter one: The development of the Frankish identity

During the time of the Fourth Crusade the people in Europe regarded the world as being inhabited by different ethnic groups. They believed these peoples varied with regard to descent, language, customs and laws. The Franks were a people who believed themselves to be the descendants of Francus, a Trojan prince who escaped the destruction of his city in the heroic age. According to legend, this Francus fled to Europe where he became the first king of the Franks. This German tribe would take over a large portion of the Roman Empire after its collapse in the fifth century. Under the emperor Charlemagne (747-814) the Frankish Empire reached its apex, comprising the territory of what we now call France, Germany, the Benelux, Austria, Switzerland, northern Italy and northern Spain.

This unity ended after the death of Charlemagne’s son Louis the Pious in 840. The Frankish empire was divided among his sons; it was split in three parts: East and West Francia and Lotharingia in the middle. Lotharingia was soon incorporated into East-Francia. Over the course of the ninth and tenth century West-Francia would lay claim to the Frankish identity and the continuation of Frankish history, the east would let the Frankish identity go. East-Francia expanded further east, gained a strong Saxon royal house with Henry I (919-936) and more importantly, claimed the Roman Imperial crown. Eastern Francia developed into the German Holy Roman Empire.

West-Francia, on the other hand, did not expand and it kings were politically weak. To bolster their legitimacy the kings emphasized their Frankish history, illustrious kings as Clovis and Charlemagne were remembered in histories and old pre-eminent Frankish centres such as Reims, Sens, Paris and Orleans were highlighted as Frankish lieux de memoire. The clergy played a large part in this, they propagated the idea of a self-evident continuity in Frankish history. Even when the Carolingian dynasty was disposed, their successors the Capetians, starting with Hugh Capet (941-996) kept using Frankish history as a legitimating tradition.

The Frankish identity had a geographical and political limit. The Capetian kings in the tenth and eleventh century could only press their authority on certain parts of the north of France. The people from the south of France were aware they were a part of the Regnum Francorum, but the king had no presence there and the southerners didn’t identify as Franks.

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12 Schneidmuller, ‘Constructing identities’, 25.
In the north the counts of Normandy and Flanders were stronger than the king, they developed a distinctive cultural identity of their own. Flanders, which was heavily urbanized and rich, developed a citizenry that felt solidarity and ties of kinship to the Flemish people.\(^{13}\) Francia, in the sense of the land where the Franks came from was the area situated between the Meuse, the Loire and the Oise, with the Ile-de-France at its centre.\(^{14}\)

One key event in the forming of a cultural identity for the Franks was the first crusade (1095-1099). A large part of the crusading army hailed from northern France, so much so that the term Franks was used for all crusaders, no matter their ancestry. This was used by northern French monks like Guibert of Nogent and Robert the monk to emphasize the special role the Franks played in God’s plan.\(^{15}\) The fight against the ‘Saracen’ Muslims gave the Franks an other to compare themselves with. This common enemy helped to bind the Franks together in a closer community, one defined by their shared Christian faith.\(^{16}\) It must be remembered that this was a slow process, many different identities like the Gothic and Burgundian identities remained.

From 1204 onwards the French kings, starting with Philip Augustus (1165-1223), expanded their authority over the entire kingdom. Once united all subjects would be Franki, a term that shifted from the original meaning of Frank to French. These people would all live under one king, with a shared history and a shared identity.\(^{17}\) One exception to this development would be the Flemish, who had their own, independent cultural identity, that couldn’t be absorbed into the Frankish identity.


\(^{14}\) Schneidmuller, ‘Constructing identities’, 25.


\(^{17}\) Schneidmuller, ‘Constructing Identities’, 40.
Chapter two: The Frankish Identity in Constantinople

In this chapter I will investigate the cultural identity of the Franks in the Latin Empire of Constantinople. Nearly all of the men who took Constantinople originated from northern France and Flanders. The recruitment drive for the fourth crusade had focused heavily on the areas Champagne, Blois, Ile de France, Flanders and Burgundy and this reflected in the composition of the army.\textsuperscript{18} They were reinforced with a strong contingent of knights from Lombardy and the Venetians sailors that brought the crusaders to Constantinople. They were all fighting men, many of them knights, their leaders barons and marquises.\textsuperscript{19} They shared a knightly ethos of chivalry, read the same books, confessed to the same catholic faith and had the same lifestyle. The families of the higher knights and barons were connected by kinship ties. Power, prestige and wealth came from the holding of land, which could be gained by marriage or inheritance. Politically they came from a feudal society that was strictly stratified, with a strong class-conscience and limited social mobility.\textsuperscript{20}

The Greeks lived in a society that was a lot less stratified. The only legal distinction was between slaves and free men. Of course there were social and economic differences, but there was a measure of social mobility. Like in the west, land was important. The Greeks had a fief-like system called pronoia, that tied dependent servant farmers to their lords, but still left them legally free.\textsuperscript{21} Politically the Byzantine state was highly centralised, with the large administrative apparatus in Constantinople controlling the empire. Religiously the Greeks were Greek Orthodox, and the Patriarch of Constantinople was the highest religious authority they recognised.

Once the Franks conquered Constantinople there was very little intermingling between Frankish and Greek culture. The Franks divided their conquered territory into feuds and parcelled it out amongst themselves.\textsuperscript{22} They planted themselves on top of existing Greek structures, demanding tax and homage, but not interfering in the daily lives of their subjects. Society in the Latin Empire was divided into two groups, the Franks as the upper class and the Greeks as the lower class. The stratified worldview of the Franks prevented them from caring about their Greek subjects. It didn’t help that the Greeks were painted as schismatics or even heretics by the papacy, or that the Byzantines had a reputation for cunning and

\textsuperscript{18} Christopher Tyerman, \textit{God’s war, a new history of the crusades} (London, 2006), 504.
\textsuperscript{19} Donald Queller, \textit{The Fourth Crusade, the Conquest of Constantinople} (Leicester, 1978), 22.
\textsuperscript{21} Jacoby, ‘Social evolution’, 182
\textsuperscript{22} Van Tricht, \textit{Latin Renovatio}, 105-109.
untrustworthiness. Most Franks lived in the safety of castles or walled cities, clustered together. They knew they were a very small minority among the Greek population. Mixed marriages were a rarity, the Franks preferred to marry within their own groups, or to import a wife from Europe. Marriage was a way of giving property and status and the Franks didn’t want Greeks to infiltrate their upper class. The offspring of mixed parentage, most of the time a Greek mother and Latin father, were called *Gasmouli*. These were often illegitimate and would gain the status of their Greek mother.

A peculiarity about the Frankish lords is that they found themselves in a double feudal dependence. They still had feudal lands and obligations in France and Flanders, on top of the lands they gained in Greece and Anatolia. Even the emperors had feudal lands in Courtenay and Flanders, they were still the vassal of the French king. In other words, the Franks kept their strong ties to their origins.

The Greeks on the other hand were not fond of the Franks. The sacking and burning of Constantinople did not endear them to the Greek elite and the farmers merely resigned themselves to the new rulers. One major stumbling block for the Greeks was that the Franks removed the Orthodox patriarch and installed a Latin one. The Franks spent little time trying to convert the Orthodox Greeks, but faith still became an identity marker. Catholics were Latin and higher on the hierarchy, Orthodox were the Greeks on the lower rungs. That didn’t mean the Franks and Greeks were completely isolated from each other. The Franks needed Greek administrators to help them with the complex Byzantine fiscal system. They also needed translators, ambassadors and advisors. In the countryside former Greek landholders collaborated with the Franks to regain status. Some Greeks even found employment as generals in the Frankish army.

But a Franco-Greek culture did not develop. The Franks distrusted the Greeks, they didn’t intermingle. The Greeks on their part were either hostile or indifferent. Strangers in a strange land, the Franks kept to their traditions, they acted and felt as westerners and they cultivated their ties to their ancestral lands, instead of cultivating new ones in the Achaean.

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23 Locke, *Franks*, 266.
26 Ibidem, 293-294.
29 Jacoby, social evolution, 201.
30 Jacoby, social evolution, 199.
Maybe, given enough time, the cultures would have grown more towards each other. But the empire fell after 57 years and the Franks kept their western identity for all that time.
Chapter three: The impact of cultural identity on the choosing of Latin Emperors

In this chapter I will investigate the circumstances in which the six emperors of the Latin Empire of Constantinople gained their position and what role their cultural identity played in becoming emperor.

Baldwin I (1204-1205)

The way the first emperor would be chosen was stipulated in the so-called march pact.\(^{31}\) This pact was made up in the days leading up to the attack on Constantinople. One of the guiding principles of the pact was that the crusaders would take over the Byzantine empire wholesale and continue it under Latin leadership.\(^{32}\) A new emperor would be chosen from the crusade leaders by a council of Venetian and Non-Venetian crusaders. On the 9\(^{th}\) of May this council was set up.\(^{33}\) The electors had to choose between two candidates: Boniface of Montferrat (c. 1150-1207), or Baldwin IX of Flanders and Hainaut (1171-1205).

Boniface seemed like a good choice: the high commander of the crusade, a marquis, an experienced soldier, the cousin of Philip Augustus (1165-1223) the king of France and on close terms with the imperial family of the Hohenstaufen.\(^{34}\) What’s more: the Byzantines left in the city seemed to see him as a legitimate claimant of the Byzantine throne. The Byzantines were by now used to usurpers, having gone through four emperors between 1180 and 1204. Those new emperors usually claimed legitimacy through marriage connections. Boniface had two brothers who were married to Byzantine princesses.\(^{35}\) He had sought to further strengthen his relational ties to the former imperial family by marrying Margaret-Maria of Hungary (1175–1223), the widow of Isaak II Angelus (1156 - 1204) days after the fall of Constantinople. Boniface even had the support of the religious elite, he was presented with the imperial crown by a group of high priests when he entered the city.\(^{36}\) As for the lower classes of Greeks, they showed their support by greeting every Latin by making a cross with their finger, saying “Aiios phasileo marchio”, the sacred emperor of the marquis.\(^{37}\)

The main rival of Boniface was Baldwin, a great leader in his own right. He was the

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\(^{31}\) Lock, The Franks, 40.
\(^{32}\) Filip van Tricht, The Latin renovatio of Byzantium (Leiden, 2011), 41.
\(^{34}\) Godfrey, Unholy Crusade, 53.
\(^{36}\) Erica Jo Gilles, ‘Nova Francia, Kingship and Identity among the Frankish Aristocracy in Conquered Byzantium’ (Princeton, 2010), 49.
most powerful vassal of the French king. He had shown to be a capable ruler in his counties, having written two charters which would later be seen to be the foundation of criminal and feudal law of Hainaut. Most of the fighting men in Constantinople were Flemish and they were fiercely loyal to Baldwin. The Flemish had a distinct culture from the Franks, but Baldwin, like his brother was born in Valanciennes in Hainaut. This was officially a province of the Holy Roman Empire, but its culture and language was French, which made Baldwin Frankish enough to be acceptable for the Franks. He had his wife on the way to join him and start a dynasty and he still had his younger brother Henry with him to take his place if he died without a son. Baldwin’s wife, Mary, was the sister to Thibaut of Champagne, who was to lead the crusade but died before it started. This familial tie created a close connection with the knights of Champagne and Baldwin, who cultivated that connection.

In the end the council chose Baldwin to be the Latin Emperor. Boniface may have fulfilled the traditional Byzantine qualifiers for the succession of the throne, marital ties to former emperors, military might as the leader of the conquering army, the support of the clergy and the people, but that wasn’t enough for the majority of the electorate. Baldwin was culturally closer to the main crusading body. He was the count of the Flemish, he had the love of the Champagnois, and the Burgundians and Normans were closer to the French/Flemings than to Boniface, who was an Italian. Furthermore, the Venetians didn’t want Boniface to win, because he was a former ally of Genoa, a rival of Venice. It is clear that cultural identity played a large role in the election of Baldwin.

Baldwin had his coronation on 16 May 1204 in the Hagia Sophia, with a ceremony that was clearly an imitation of a Byzantine one. The election of Baldwin had several consequences. First it caused considerable tension between Baldwin and Boniface, who claimed the lands around Thessalonica as his own kingdom as a consolation prise. This tension was resolved after arbitration of a joint parlement of Venetians and Crusaders. The second was the isolation of the Latin Empire. Baldwin stayed on the throne for only a year until he died in 1205, so it’s hard to know how his reign would have developed, but in that

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40 Gilles, Nova Francia, 41.
42 Gilles, Nova Francia, 21.
44 Van Tricht, Latin Renovatio, 48.
year he displayed an unwillingness to adapt himself to his new surroundings. Baldwin showed a profoundly conservative, western attitude. He did not make any alliances with the nearby powers, in fact he rebuffed friendly overtures from the Bulgar king Kalojan (1169-1207), turning a friend into an enemy. He made no attempt to reach out to his Greek subjects. These were at first open to welcome their new masters, but harsh treatment from arrogant Franks drove them towards the Bulgars. There was also no attempt made to seek alliances from the eastern and western centres of resistance in Nicea and Epirus respectively, or to contact the Selchuck empire to the east in Anatolia. The Latin Empire was surrounded on all sides with hostile forces and they often had to fight in two fronts at the same time, something they did not have the recourses for. Perhaps Boniface, with his Byzantine connections and knowledge of Byzantine culture and tradition could have made for a smoother transition from a Greek to a Latin empire, but we will never know.

Baldwin paid the price for his short-sighted policy when Kalojan, allied with the Greeks seized Adrianople in 1205. Baldwin lost most of his army trying to take Adrianople back and he himself was captured and later executed by Kalojan. Demoralised by this enormous defeat, almost 7,000 Crusaders left the Latin Empire and went back to Europe. The Latin Empire had almost no army to speak of. To the north the Bulgars were a force to be reckoned with. To the east Theodore Laskaris (1174-1222) was consolidating his power, in 1208 he would proclaim himself emperor in Nicea. To the west Michael I Komnenos Doukas (c. 1170-1215) was trying to do the same thing. All three powers had designs on Constantinople.

Henry I 1206-1216

With Baldwin in chains and his fate unknown, his brother Henry of Flanders (c. 1176-1216) became acting regent of the empire. Baldwin’s wife had died of the plague on her way to Constantinople and he had left no sons, so the choice fell naturally on Henry. When Baldwin’s death was finally confirmed in 1206 Henry was duly crowned emperor. There was no election, Henry simply took power when the empire needed him, his position legitimised by his blood relationship to the old emperor and the crisis. Luckily for the Latins Henry turned out to be a good ruler. Henry came from Flanders, just like Baldwin. He too was

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47 Godfrey, Unholy Crusade, 141.
48 Ibidem 142.
49 Krijnie Ciggaar, ‘Flemish Counts and Emperors, friends and foreigners in Byzantium’, in: Victoria van Aalst (red.), The Latin Empire, some contributions (Hemen, 1990), 33-62; alhier 44.
ingrained with western ideals and values, he mistrusted and disliked the Greeks and Byzantines, he saw the Bulgars as savages. Nonetheless he overcame these prejudices, out of pragmatic concerns for his empire. The Latin empire could never survive if the Franks didn’t let go of their western-centric way of thinking, they had to adapt, fit in. They had to tap in the alliance network the other nearby powers were building, and marriage would be a tool to accomplish this. Diplomatically gifted, he reversed his brothers isolationist policy and began making treaties with his neighbours, solidified by marriages. When Kalojan died in 1207 the Bulgarian kingdom erupted in civil war. Henry used marriage to bind himself to two pretenders and managed to secure friendly relations to the eventual victor John Asen II (1218-1241). Henry tried unsuccessfully to marry his brother to the daughter of Michael Doukas of Epirus. And in 1215 he married his niece Yolande of Courtenay (c. 1200–1233) to Andrew II of Hungary (c. 1177-1235). He tried to make the Latin Empire a part of the world of the Achaean, with familiar ties bound to the region and stable relationships to the otherwise aggressive rulers around him.

Henry did his best to ensure the safety of his realm by grounding it more in its oriental context. However, his unexpected death in 1216 and lack of a son, had as a consequence that Constantinople would soon look west again.

Peter I (1217-1219)

It fell to the Frankish barons of the Latin Empire to choose a suitable new emperor, the Venetians no longer played a role in the selection. The barons of Constantinople took on the same role as the barons of Jerusalem; that of kingmaker and power behind the throne. Because the barons were all Frankish their cultural identity would steer their decision making. The new emperor was sought over the border of the empire, an outsider would bring gold and fighting men with him, of which the empire was in dire need. After a few months two candidates had been found: the king of Hungary, Andrew II and the count of Courtenay Peter II (1155-1219). Both had marital ties to the late emperors and had their own advantages and disadvantages.

Andrew was on friendly terms with the Latin Empire, having married the niece of Henry. Hungary was a relatively strong state, with a large military force, catholic in religion,

51 Ibidem, 60.
52 Ibidem, 62-72.
53 Angold, *Identities and allegiances*, 50.
close to the empire. Its geographic location meant that military aid would not be far off and that Bulgaria could be attacked from two directions if necessary. The disadvantage was that Andrew was Hungarian and not Frankish, cultural differences would be difficult to overcome. Besides Yolande there were no kinship ties. Another disadvantage was that Andrew was already king, the barons feared that he would put the need of Hungary before the need of the empire. What’s worse, Andrew might even try to reduce the empire to a Hungarian province, replacing the Franks with his own agents.56

Peter was the grandson of Louis VI of France (1081-1137) and a prominent figure in the French court. He was married to Yolande of Hainaut (1175–1219), the sister of Baldwin I and Henry I. He fathered Yolande of Courtenay, the girl who married Andrew, so a friendly relationship with Hungary was still possible. A sister of the former emperor was closer than a niece. The familial kinships Peter had were important, but so were the cultural ties with the Frankish barons in the empire, they would feel more at ease with a Frank such as them. Courtenay lay in the heartland of Francia. Peter fought in the third crusade, he was an experienced soldier and he would bring some much needed reinforcements with him, if he were to come to Constantinople. His connection to the French throne would be helpful if the empire needed extra men or funds. In Europe he was the lord over Courtenay, Auxerre, Neverre and Tonnerre. The disadvantage of Peter was that any reinforcements he would bring would be limited and one time only. Help from France was possible, but could be hard to get, because of the distance to France.57

In the end the Barons chose Peter. The cultural similarities, kinship ties, French connection, and crusader reputation trumped the advantage of having a close and powerful ally. Peter and Yolande obtained coronation in 1217 by the pope. This coronation was held in the church of S. Lorenzo, just outside the walls of Rome, to not upset the Holy Roman Emperor. This coronation underlines the western outlook of the imperial couple.58 In May Peter set out with an army of 5,500 men, to travel to Greece overland and reclaim Macedonia. This turned into disaster when Peters army was destroyed and he was taken captor by Theodore Doukas (c. 1180-1255), Michael Doukas’s successor. Peter was never seen again.59 His wife, pregnant with the future Baldwin II (1217-1273) travelled by sea and ruled as regent for two years before she too died. Interestingly enough she continued the marriage tactic of diplomacy of Henry, she married her daughter Mary to Theodore Laskaris in return

56 Gilles, Nova Francia, 93.
57 Ibidem 94-97.
58 John Julius Norwhich, Byzantium, the decline and fall (London, 1995), 191.
59 Ibidem, 91.
for a peaceful eastern border.\textsuperscript{60} It appears Henry’s strategy of anchoring the Latin empire through marriage ties was continued after his death, although briefly.

\textbf{Robert I (1221-1228)}

When Yolande passed away the barons followed the Franki tradition of primogeniture and chose her eldest son, Philippe of Namur (1195–1226), to be their next emperor.\textsuperscript{61} Philippe was a marquis with extensive military and governmental experience. He refused the honour, feeling perhaps that his power and status was big enough in northern France and that an adventure to an unstable empire surrounded by enemies would only jeopardise this. He recommended his younger brother Robert of Courtenay, who immediately accepted when asked.\textsuperscript{62}

Robert was a poor choice for emperor: young and untested, as a second son he didn’t have the governmental experience his older brother had. Robert only held a few minor properties between Douai and Bouchain in Flanders. He held no position at French court and he never fought a battle. None of that seem to matter to the barons of Constantinople, their main concern was that Robert was a son of Peter and as such a legitimate successor.\textsuperscript{63}

Robert’s reign was disastrous for the realm and the empire suffered massive loss of ground in this time. It also meant the end of the policy of cultural integration that Henry I envisaged. In the east he was attacked by Theodore Doukas, who took Thessalonica in 1224 and in the west the Nicean emperor John III Doukas Vatatzes (1193-1253) conquered most the Latin holdings in Asia minor and invaded Europe. No attempt was made to seek alliances by Robert, relying instead on fighting two-front wars, which all ended in defeat.\textsuperscript{64} Only the intervention of the Bulgarian king John II Asen (1190-1241) stopped Constantinople itself from falling.\textsuperscript{65} Vatatzes offered his daughter for marriage to Robert, coupled with a close alliance, but Robert refused the girl. Instead he married the daughter of an obscure Frankish knight.\textsuperscript{66} His barons, enraged by this irresponsible behaviour mutilated the poor girl and drowned her mother. Robert, too weak to confront his barons, fled to Rome. The pope sent him back to Constantinople, but Robert died on the journey back, in 1228.\textsuperscript{67}

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\textsuperscript{60} Ciggaar, ‘Flemish Counts and Emperors’, 48.
\textsuperscript{61} Filip van Tricht, ‘Robert de Courtenay, an idiot on the throne of Constantinople?’, \textit{Speculum} 88 (2013), 996 – 1034, alhier 1022.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibidem, 1023.
\textsuperscript{63} Gilles, \textit{Nova Francia}, 117.
\textsuperscript{64} Wolf, ‘Latin Empire’, 214.
\textsuperscript{65} Wolf, Latin empire, 215.
\textsuperscript{66} Van Tricht, ‘An Idiot’, 1026.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibidem, 1028.
there would be no more attempts to seek marital ties to the indigenous peoples around the eastern Mediterranean.

**John I (1229-1237)**

Again the barons of Constantinople were confronted with the death of an emperor. There was a successor, Baldwin II, son of Peter and Yolande, but he was only eleven years old, a regent was needed. The empire was greatly reduced and impoverished, its enemies seemed ready to finish it off. In this time of crisis a strong leader was necessary, one who could bring along some fighting men. As before the choice was between a foreign king and a Frank, respectively John Asen II of Bulgaria and John of Brienne (c1170-1237). Both had daughters to wed Baldwin and form a relationship.

John Asen was a direct neighbour of the Latin Empire. Back in 1218 Asen had won a civil war for the Bulgarian throne, after which he consolidated his power and won back lost territories. He was a wise and temperate ruler who was generous towards conquered people. Asen was friendly toward Constantinople, acting as its protector against the Greeks in 1226. Furthermore Asen promised that, were he to become regent he would reconquer lost imperial lands in Thrace and Macedon out of his own costs. Constantinople was weak and ailing, intimately allying itself with a strong, wealthy tsar could be the boost it needed to grow strong again. A tentative arrangement with Asen was made for his daughters hand, but it fell through. A growing number of barons felt that this arrangement would be effectively the end of the Latin Empire, it would be absorbed into Asen’s realm.

Instead of Asen, the throne was offered to John of Brienne, a Frank from champagne who participated in a leading role in the fifth crusade and was once the king of Jerusalem (1210-1225). No-one had more experience in ruling a beleaguered crusader state. He was closely connected to the papacy and he shared a kinship, through marriage, to both the Courtenay house and the French royal family. All these qualities were appealing to the barons. What was even more important, Brienne came from northern France and shared the Frankish culture the barons had. In April 1229 the treaty was signed by which John became emperor. This agreement was far more suited for Johns needs than the empires. It stipulated that John would become sole emperor for his entire life and a guardian to Baldwin, until the

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70 Ibidem, 136.
71 Perry, *John of Brienne*, 150.
boy was twenty. At that age he would be invested with the kingdom of Nicea. Baldwin was to wed John’s daughter Marie and he would succeed John of Brienne after his death. John was free to bequeath substantial imperial lands to his relatives. The final draft even stipulated John would become emperor even if Baldwin or Marie died before they could be wed. These terms showed how desperate the Franks were to find an emperor, and yet they still didn’t want a cultural outsider on the throne, preferring instead to go all the way to Europe.

Turning down John Asen had the effect of alienating the one friendly power on the border of the Latin empire. In 1232 he gained an alliance with the Nicean Greeks and in 1235 he launched a massive Bulgar/Greek assault on Constantinople. John of Brienne managed to save the city with adequate leadership, coupled with a heroic charge. Besides that high point John didn’t do much. He didn’t pursue an aggressive policy of reconquest, his campaigns were limited and inconclusive. His recruited soldiers went unpaid and many defected to the enemy. Diplomatically John was passive too. He made no new alliances, no political marriages were attempted and no attempts to use his contacts in France to get aid. Though he did send Baldwin to Europe in 1236 to ask for donations, this was more because Baldwin was nearing twenty, he could become a rival to John’s power. John died in 1237, having accomplished very little in Constantinople.

Baldwin II (1237–1273)

Of all the emperors of the Latin Empire, Baldwin II was the only one born in the purple, his throne assured by birthright as well as the treaty with John of Brienne in 1229. Heir to an impoverished empire that consisted of Constantinople and not much else, Baldwin could do little else than beg the western powers for aid. He pawned off any relics Constantinople still had, like the crown of thorns. To get loans he even used his own son as collateral. In the end it all came to naught, as the Nicean Greeks took Constantinople by surprise in 1261. Baldwin had to flee for his life. He kept his imperial title until his death in 1273.

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73 Perry, *John of Brienne*, 151-152.
75 Perry, *John of Brienne*, 171.
78 Norwich, *Decline and Fall*, 202
Every time the barons were confronted with the need to choose a new emperor, they would pick one that was culturally closest to them, even when arguably better candidates were available. Kinship ties were important too. Baldwin I was chosen over Boniface, because the Flemish/French faction was stronger than the Italian one. Henry simply took power when Baldwin died, but he was not opposed by the barons, because he was closely related to Baldwin. Peter I, far away in Courtenay, was preferable to the much stronger candidate Andrew, because he shared the French culture with the Franks. For Robert there was not even an election, it was enough that he was an heir of Peter. John won the crown for the same reasons as Peter. Baldwin II was both the son of a former emperor and married to the daughter of another. So we can say that cultural identity played a considerable role in the selection of emperors and it would trump other factors. Even with considerable threats to the empire the Franks could not tear themselves away from their cultural blinders.
Conclusion

The Franks in the Latin Empire had their own identity, distinct from the Greek Byzantine people they came to rule. These cultures clashed; the Greeks thought the Franks barbarous and uncouth, the Franks saw the Greeks as schismatic and untrustworthy. During the years of the Latin Empire the two cultures didn’t intermingle much. Because of this and the cultural, political and familial ties of northern France the Franks kept, they didn’t develop into a Franco-Greek culture. This meant that the Franks would identify as western and that they would keep seeing their Greek, Hungarian and Bulgarian neighbours as strangers.

This had consequences. Because the Franks didn’t adapt, their empire was destroyed. They alienated potential allies and their own subjects. They couldn’t fully tap into the relational and alliance network their neighbours would develop, which meant they were often attacked on multiple fronts, without hope of relief.

It also affected their choice of emperors. If the Franks were able to adapt more to their new context the lineage of the Italian, Hungarian and Bulgarian also-rans would be less of a barrier. As it was they relied on candidates who shared their culture, but who could bring limited help and who often had even less talent to lead. Because these emperors would have to come from far away, they would have even less affinity with the eastern culture than the barons had, ensuring even more separation between the Franks and their environs. As it was, the western-centric way the Franks had of choosing leaders was one of the reasons the Latin Empire fell.
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