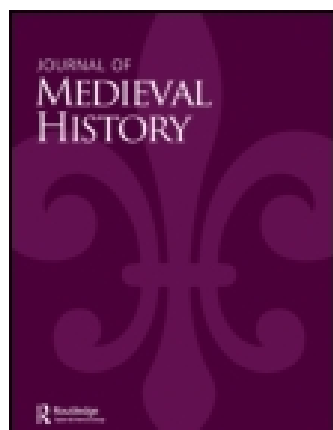


This article was downloaded by: [Thomas Smith]

On: 20 January 2015, At: 04:37

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Journal of Medieval History

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmed20>

Between two kings: Pope Honorius III and the seizure of the kingdom of Jerusalem by Frederick II in 1225

Thomas W. Smith^a

^a Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, 80539 Munich, Germany

Published online: 14 Oct 2014.



CrossMark

[Click for updates](#)

To cite this article: Thomas W. Smith (2015) Between two kings: Pope Honorius III and the seizure of the kingdom of Jerusalem by Frederick II in 1225, *Journal of Medieval History*, 41:1, 41-59, DOI: [10.1080/03044181.2014.970661](https://doi.org/10.1080/03044181.2014.970661)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03044181.2014.970661>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Between two kings: Pope Honorius III and the seizure of the kingdom of Jerusalem by Frederick II in 1225

Thomas W. Smith*

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, 80539 Munich, Germany

(Received 25 February 2014; final version received 2 April 2014)

The consensus on Pope Honorius III (1216–27) is that he was a conciliatory politician who lacked the harder edge possessed by Innocent III, his immediate predecessor, and Gregory IX, his successor. Yet, using overlooked evidence regarding the role of Honorius in Frederick II's seizure of the kingdom of Jerusalem from John of Brienne in 1225, this article reveals that he was capable of acting in a ruthlessly pragmatic manner. It provides a rare case study of the duplicitous uses that could be made of the papal chancery by an early thirteenth-century pope while navigating a difficult diplomatic path between two kings.

Keywords: Pope Honorius III; Emperor Frederick II; John of Brienne; Queen Isabella II of Jerusalem; kingdom of Jerusalem; crusades; papal registers

After Emperor Frederick II (1220–50) married Isabella II of Jerusalem in 1225 he immediately seized the kingdom of Jerusalem from her father, John of Brienne, in a lightning putsch. The role of Pope Honorius III (1216–27), who acted as an intermediary between the two kings of Jerusalem, remains ambivalent, despite the traditional interpretation that he was appalled by the coup and tried to recover John's throne. Honorius was a strong supporter of Frederick, with whom he was working closely to achieve the long awaited imperial crusade to the Holy Land, yet he also *appeared* to champion the claim of John as the rightful king of Jerusalem. The question of exactly how the pope was involved in the affair has ramifications for understanding the reputation of Honorius and his capabilities as a diplomat, which have long been underestimated. This article offers a reassessment of the pope's relationships with John and Frederick. It also has a broader significance for the study of the medieval papacy: it provides a rare case study of the surreptitious uses to which the papal chancery might be put by an early thirteenth-century pope treading a difficult diplomatic path between two competing lay powers.

Honorius has traditionally been charged with accusations of political naïvety and meekness, a pope who favoured conciliation over confrontation, yet the careful re-examination of the sources for this episode permits one to sketch a different picture of the man. Previously overlooked evidence from the papal registers and a neglected chronicle are used to argue for the first time that Honorius subtly negotiated the fallout from the putsch, not only to remove John from contention and secure Frederick's position as king of Jerusalem, but also to acquire the

*Email: Thomas.Smith.2009@live.rhul.ac.uk

deposed king as a rector of the Papal State. Honorius emerges from this affair as a shrewd and calculating politician.

The character of Honorius III

The reputation of Honorius has long suffered from robustly critical assessments by a number of influential scholars. In 1895 Johannes Clausen cited one of Honorius' own letters to argue that the pope always proceeded with mildness rather than severity.¹ Horace K. Mann asserted in 1925 that the pontificate of Honorius was 'simply an echo of that of his great predecessor [Innocent III]'. Mann explained that Honorius did not 'always use the same bold and determined methods as Innocent in pushing his policy. He was essentially a man of peace, almost a man of peace at any price.'² In 1931 Ernst Kantorowicz labelled Honorius a 'pigmy' in comparison to Innocent III, and judged Honorius to have been old, frail and inclined towards gentleness.³ Despite praising the pope for ably seconding Innocent's crusading efforts, in 1950 Joseph Donovan still wrote elsewhere in the same work of 'mild, too-trusting Honorius'.⁴ In a similar vein, in 1954, Steven Runciman believed that the pope 'was a simple man who regarded his [Frederick's] promises as genuine', and thus had the wool pulled over his eyes by the emperor.⁵ Thomas Van Cleve adopted a view in 1972 that paralleled Donovan, writing that Honorius was 'mild and conciliatory'.⁶ Peter Partner commented that same year that Honorius' 'policy was pacific, unimaginative and much concerned with detail'.⁷ In 1988, Hans Mayer's view mirrored that of Mann when he posited that Honorius 'was a lesser man, lacking the political strength and energy of his great predecessor'.⁸ Finally, in 2010, it was maintained by Michael Walsh in his revision of J. N. D. Kelly's work that Honorius was 'outmanoeuvred politically by the emperor'.⁹ The picture that emerges from this historiography is that Honorius was essentially a bland and weak-willed politician, a pope who would make almost any compromise necessary in order to avoid conflict.

Honorius has, nevertheless, had supporters. Raoul Manselli propounded an original view of the pope in 1963, when he argued that Honorius was not weak and submissive, but rather wise and prudent, and therefore compared well with the traditional 'great' popes of the thirteenth century.¹⁰ In the following decades, James Powell built upon this interpretation, advocating the most influentially positive views of Honorius to date. In 1977 he questioned the interpretations of Honorius as a weak pope, countering that 'conciliation and compromise represented a key to a

¹ Johannes Clausen, *Papst Honorius III. (1216–1227): eine Monographie* (Bonn: P. Hauptmann, 1895), 10.

² Horace K. Mann, *The Lives of the Popes in the Middle Ages*. 2nd edn. 18 vols. (London: Kegan Paul, 1925–32) 13: 20.

³ Ernst Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194–1250*, trans. E.O. Lorimer (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1931), 96.

⁴ Joseph P. Donovan, *Pelagius and the Fifth Crusade* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1950), 105; cf. 28, for the more favourable assessment.

⁵ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*. 3 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950–4), 3: 164.

⁶ Thomas Curtis Van Cleve, *The Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen: Immutator Mundi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 109.

⁷ Peter Partner, *The Lands of St Peter: the Papal State in the Middle Ages and the Early Renaissance* (London: Methuen, 1972), 244.

⁸ Hans Eberhard Mayer, *The Crusades*, trans. John Gillingham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 220.

⁹ J.N.D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes*, rev. Michael J. Walsh. 2nd edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 190.

¹⁰ Raoul Manselli, 'Onorio III e Federico II: revisione d'un giudizio?', *Studi Romani* 11 (1963): 142.

new era of co-operation' with the emperor.¹¹ Then, in 1986, Powell suggested that scholars should 'reject the view that Honorius was weak and indecisive', and instead sought to argue that he acted firmly and decisively in his political affairs.¹² This greater appreciation of the pope's capabilities has been carried forward in the research of Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt and Rebecca Rist. In 2007, Fonnesberg-Schmidt emphasised the progressive, innovative aspects of Honorius' stance on crusading in the Baltic and, in 2009, Rist questioned his reputation for mildness by drawing attention to his stinging rebukes of the lay powers in southern France regarding the crusades against heresy.¹³ In 2012, Marcello Pacifico outlined a broadly positive view of Honorius' commitment to the Fifth Crusade. Most recently, Pierre-Vincent Claverie has established the vigour with which Honorius conducted his crusade affairs, and re-asserted Manselli's view that he should be considered the equal of Innocent III and Gregory IX.¹⁴ The overall interpretation arising from these works is that Honorius was a pope who conducted his diplomacy in a more conciliatory manner than Innocent III, his predecessor, and Gregory IX, his successor, but that he was nonetheless successful as a politician.

The evidence presented in this article reinforces the more positive view, yet it also takes us much further than merely endorsing the general consensus that Honorius was a co-operative but effective pope. The sharp and underhand diplomacy that he pursued over the seizure of the crown of Jerusalem complicates this view. From outside the papal curia, Honorius appeared to pursue a conciliatory approach by championing John's claim and posing as the intermediary between the two kings, yet the evidence from within the papal chancery demonstrates that he was secretly supporting Frederick's right and effectively setting John to one side. By averting open conflict the pope managed to profit from both sides without losing the favour of either. Far from being gentle, weak and naïve, as earlier scholars claimed and more recent studies have yet to disprove completely, when the occasion called for it Honorius was capable of acting in a ruthlessly pragmatic way in order to exploit confrontation for the benefit of the papacy. The seizure of the throne of Jerusalem by Frederick was just one such occasion.

The proposed marriage between Frederick II and Isabella II

Honorius was closely involved in the events leading to John's deposition from the beginning. It was the pope and his cardinals in the first instance who lobbied for the marriage between Frederick and Isabella, which eventually led to the coup of 1225. The marriage proposal fits into the context of long running papal-imperial negotiations over Frederick's vow to lead a crusade to the Holy Land. Frederick had made his crusade vow at Aachen in 1215 during his coronation as king of the Romans, although serious negotiations with the pope over its fulfilment did not take place until the turn of 1218/19, when the Fifth Crusade (1217–21) had already been under way for about a year and a half.¹⁵ After continued postponements,

¹¹ James M. Powell, 'Honorius III and the Leadership of the Crusade', *Catholic Historical Review* 63 (1977): 531.

¹² James M. Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade, 1213–1221* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 110–11.

¹³ Iben Fonnesberg-Schmidt, *The Popes and the Baltic Crusades, 1147–1254* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 149–53; Rebecca Rist, *The Papacy and Crusading in Europe, 1198–1245* (London: Continuum, 2009), 82–3.

¹⁴ Marcello Pacifico, *Federico II e Gerusalemme al tempo delle crociate: relazioni tra cristianità e islam nello spazio euro-mediterraneo medievale, 1215–1250* (Caltanissetta-Rome: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 2012), 55–7; Pierre-Vincent Claverie, *Honorius III et l'Orient (1216–1227): étude et publication de sources inédites des Archives vaticanes (ASV)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 271.

¹⁵ Traditionally Frederick's position as leader-in-waiting of the crusade has been dated to his coronation in 1215, or the spring of 1217. See, respectively, Christopher Tyerman, *God's War: a New History of the*

Frederick was too late to take part in the Fifth Crusade, which foundered during a march on Cairo in August 1221. From 1221 until the death of Honorius in 1227, the emperor and the pope conducted negotiations over the crusade at a series of colloquia, held at Veroli in 1222, Ferentino in 1223 and, finally, San Germano in 1225. The ongoing diplomacy was characterised by papal efforts to prepare the way for the dilatory emperor to depart. Honorius strove to achieve this by granting imperial petitions connected to the crusade, which drove the agenda of negotiations. The meeting at Veroli seems to have been preliminary in nature and served mostly to set in motion preparations for the second colloquium. At Ferentino the fateful decision was made that Frederick would marry Isabella II, the heiress to the throne of Jerusalem, and a crusade deadline was set for the feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist (24 June 1225).¹⁶

It appears that the suggestion of marriage originated at the colloquium with the patriarch of Jerusalem and the rest of the contingent from the kingdom of Jerusalem. Honorius mentioned the influence of the Syrian delegation in his crusade encyclical issued a month after the conference, *Iustus Dominus in*.¹⁷ In other sources though, both Honorius and the emperor stated that it was the pope and his cardinals that counselled marriage to Isabella. On 5 August 1223, Honorius granted Frederick a dispensation to marry Isabella, who was within the prohibited four degrees of consanguinity, and in the letter the proposed marriage was described as ‘according to our advice and that of our brothers [the cardinals]’.¹⁸ Frederick himself stressed, in two documents issued on 5 March 1224 and 6 December 1227, that he had inclined himself to accept the marriage as a result of the strenuous urgings and persuasion of Honorius and the cardinals, so as to bring about the crusade.¹⁹ It is unlikely that Frederick needed as much convincing as he claimed. His portrayal of events in these two documents was clearly intended to curry favour first with Honorius in 1224, who was impatient with the repeated delays to the imperial crusade and, then, following his excommunication by Gregory IX in 1227, to propagate a positive account of his dealings with the papacy. The so-called *Chronicle of Santa Maria de Ferraria*, written contemporaneously by a well-informed anonymous Cistercian monk at the

Crusades (London: Allen Lane, 2006), 625; Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 125. Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that this should be pushed forward to the turn of 1218/19: Thomas W. Smith, ‘Pope Honorius III and the Holy Land Crusades, 1216–1227: a Study in Responsive Papal Government’ (PhD diss., Royal Holloway, University of London, 2013), 61–4, 88.

¹⁶ Wolfgang Stürmer, *Friedrich II., 1194–1250*. 2 vols. in 1 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2009), 2: 91.

¹⁷ Linda Ross, ‘Frederick II: Tyrant or Benefactor of the Latin East?’, *Al-Masaq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 15 (2003): 151; Vatican City, Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Reg[istra] Vat[icana] [hereafter Reg. Vat.] 12, f. 53r: ‘Denique ut ad id plenius suum manifestaret affectum, et plus fidei daretur negotio ac omnino suspicionis contrarie scrupulus tolleretur, ad instantiam patriarche predicti et aliorum orientalium in nostra et fratrum nostrorum presentia et multitudinis hominum qui ad colloquium venerant se ducturum in uxorem legitimam filiam regis eiusdem iurisiurandi religione firmavit’; Petrus Pressutti, ed., *Regesta Honorii Papae III*. 2 vols. (Rome: Ex Typographica Vaticana, 1888–95), 2: [no.] 4262 [hereafter Pressutti; references are to entry numbers unless otherwise indicated.]

¹⁸ Reg. Vat. 12, f. 84v: ‘...ut exhiberes circa Christi causam ferventioris devotionis affectum, et ad prosecutionem eius te artius obligans, alios ad id efficacius exhorteris, fastigium excellentie imperialis decenter humilians, ad consilium nostrum et fratrum nostrorum nobilem mulierem Isabellam natam karissimi in Christo filli nostri Iohannis illustris regis Ierosolimitani affidaveris publice in uxorem...’; Pressutti, 2: 4460. See also Claverie, *Honorius III et l’Orient*, 109.

¹⁹ Eduard Winkelmann, ed., *Acta imperii inedita seculi XIII: Urkunden und Briefe zur Geschichte des Kaiserreichs und des Königreichs Sicilien in den Jahren 1198 bis 1273*. 2 vols. (Innsbruck: Verlag der Wagner’schen Universitäts-Buchhandlung, 1880–5), 1: 237 (no. 261); Ludwig Weiland, ed., *Constitutiones et acta publica imperatorum et regum*. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Constitutiones 2 (Hanover: Impensis Bibliopolii Hahniani, 1896), 151 (no. 116).

monastery of the same name in the diocese of Teano, Campania, indicates that the decision was taken as a result of the counsel of the pope and cardinals.²⁰ The ‘Colbert-Fontainebleau’ Old French continuation of William of Tyre notes that Hermann von Salza, the master of the Teutonic Order, played an intermediary role between Frederick and John (the extent of which is questionable) and, crucially, that it was agreed that John would retain the crown for the rest of his life.²¹ Jonathan Riley-Smith followed this source in attributing the marriage proposal to the master of the Teutonic Knights.²²

After weighing up all the evidence, Wolfgang Stürmer decided that it was probably Honorius who suggested the union despite the fact that the pope himself had stressed the role of the patriarch of Jerusalem in *Iustus Dominus in*.²³ Yet it is hard to discount Honorius’ own statement from this encyclical, which was addressed to such a wide readership throughout Christendom that he was unlikely purposely to misrepresent the role of the patriarch. Therefore a middle course should be steered between Ross and Stürmer. It seems likely that the patriarch and the Syrian delegation first suggested the match (although the idea could already have been latent at the papal curia), but it is clear from the weight of evidence that the proposal was then discussed, endorsed and subsequently recommended to the emperor by the pope and his cardinals.

The conclusion to draw from this is that, from at least the time of Ferentino onwards, Honorius wanted Frederick to assume an influential role in the kingdom of Jerusalem, and that he played an important part in persuading him. Although it was surely the case, as both Guy Perry and Nicholas Morton argue, that a formal agreement was made between John and Frederick safeguarding the position of the former,²⁴ it must nevertheless have been apparent to the papacy that the emperor might bid for the throne himself. While it has been contended that the matter of who possessed the superior claim ‘was not looked at closely’ prior to the wedding, it is hard to conceive that no one in the papal or Jerusalemite camps realised that Frederick’s claim through marriage to Queen Isabella would be superior to that of John as her father.²⁵ Indeed, the very pact made at the colloquium allowing John to maintain his position as king was tacit acknowledgement of this.

In 1223 the emperor was in the prime of his life: when the marriage was proposed at Ferentino, Frederick was still only 28 years old. John of Brienne, on the other hand, though by no means aged, was born in the mid-1170s, and so was some 20 years older.²⁶ Frederick held out the possibility of continuing the royal Jerusalemite dynasty, whereas in this respect, John’s

²⁰ Augustus Gaudenzi, ed., *Ignoti monachi Cisterciensis S. Mariae de Ferraria chronica et Ryccardi de Sancto Germano chronica priora*. Società Napoletana di storia patria, Monumenti storici, Serie prima, Cronache 3 (Naples: Francesco Giannini, 1888), 38: ‘Ex consilio vero quidem pape Honorii atque curie Romane idem imperator accepit in matrimonium filiam dicti Iohannis regis Ierosolimitani sibi unicam cum eodem regno sibi pertinenti.’ For discussion of this chronicle and its importance for Honorius’ pontificate, see below.

²¹ *L’Estoire de Eracles empeureur*, in *Recueil des historiens des croisades: historiens occidentaux*, vol. 2 (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1859), 358. On the role of Hermann von Salza, see Stürmer, *Friedrich II.*, 2: 93, n. 15. Cf. Nicholas E. Morton, *The Teutonic Knights in the Holy Land, 1190–1291* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), 51. On the negotiations and Frederick’s promise to John, see Guy Perry, *John of Brienne: King of Jerusalem, Emperor of Constantinople, c.1175–1237* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 124.

²² Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Feudal Nobility and the Kingdom of Jerusalem, 1174–1277* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 159.

²³ Stürmer, *Friedrich II.*, 2: 93 and n. 15.

²⁴ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 124; Morton, *Teutonic Knights*, 51.

²⁵ David Abulafia, *Frederick II: a Medieval Emperor* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 150.

²⁶ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 17.

time had already passed. John's hold on the crown of Jerusalem as *de facto* king could also have been stronger. He had assumed the crown as king consort through his marriage to Queen Maria of Jerusalem in 1210, yet with her death shortly afterwards in 1212, John's position was gravely undermined.²⁷ As Bernard Hamilton states, John's claim to power now rested on the rights of his daughter Isabella: 'By the laws of the kingdom John, though undoubtedly rightful regent, was no longer king.'²⁸ It had not only been John's theoretical right to the throne that was weakened following the death of Maria – he had also experienced difficulties in the practical exercise of royal power. Around this time he quarrelled with an important section of the Frankish nobility, and was hamstrung by a lack of land with which to reward his own supporters through whom he might have reinforced his position against his opponents amongst the Syrian retainers.²⁹ In terms of the resources available to both men, Frederick's hold on the German empire and the kingdom of Sicily meant that he easily outclassed John – they were not equal competitors, and this must have been apparent to everyone concerned, especially the Syrian nobility and the pope. It was therefore relatively easy for Frederick to depose John in 1225. John had a history of less than perfect relations with his barons; and after Frederick's marriage to Isabella in 1225, the emperor acquired a stronger claim to the throne as husband of the reigning queen than John did as regent. The emperor possessed both might and, if one disregards the ill-judged pact that John made with him at Ferentino, also right. It is surely important to note that Frederick's claim was never challenged in Outremer by lawyers, such as John of Ibelin and Philip of Novara, even during their rebellion against the emperor.³⁰

It was perhaps apparent then to the pope in 1223 that the kingdom's future survival would better depend on the young emperor than the reigning king, as the proposal of the Frankish delegation at Ferentino seemed implicitly to suggest. Whether Honorius went so far at this point as to envisage Frederick seizing John's throne in contravention of the agreement made at that colloquium, however, can only be guessed at. Yet if one takes a long view of the pope's involvement in the affair, and his earlier relations with John during the Fifth Crusade, it becomes clear that the king had never enjoyed Honorius' full confidence when it came to the defence and recovery of the Holy Land. In fact, Honorius had previously attempted to cut John out of the leadership of the Fifth Crusade by using a method very similar to that which he employed after Frederick's putsch.

Honorius' relations with John and Frederick before 1223

The pope's support for Frederick's deposition of John after the event is not so surprising when one reconsiders his earlier relations with the two monarchs. From the beginning of Honorius' pontificate the pope did not seem to consider John as the most desirable leader of the Fifth Crusade. Although Perry has pointed out that, in the eyes of the pope, John was never in contention for the role since it had been normal for the most powerful Western crusade leader to become the campaign chief in the Near East, this tradition was by no means binding.³¹ There was nothing to prevent John from assuming a leading position, as indeed eventually occurred. It is unclear from the sources why Honorius seemed concerned to steer control of

²⁷ Bernard Hamilton, 'King Consorts of Jerusalem and Their Entourages from the West from 1186 to 1250', in idem, *Crusaders, Cathars and the Holy Places* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999), chapter 2, 19–20.

²⁸ Hamilton, 'King Consorts of Jerusalem', 20. See also Peter W. Edbury, *John of Ibelin and the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1997), 33.

²⁹ Hamilton, 'King Consorts of Jerusalem', 20–1; Perry, *John of Brienne*, 67–9; Edbury, *John of Ibelin*, 32.

³⁰ Pacifico, *Federico II e Gerusalemme*, 150.

³¹ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 98.

the crusade away from the king of Jerusalem. Based on the surprising lack of correspondence recorded between the pope and John throughout Honorius' pontificate, the pope was perhaps not convinced of his ability to direct a large, multi-national crusade successfully.

If one uses Pressutti's calendar to conduct an approximate count of Honorius' letters addressed to John throughout the nearly 11 years of his pontificate, it yields a total of only eight letters.³² Of these, only three were addressed to John alone³³ (and one of these reprimanded him for abandoning the Fifth Crusade),³⁴ two were addressed to the army of the Fifth Crusade and therefore also included John by name,³⁵ and the remaining three were also despatched *in eundem modum* to other recipients, so were not a special sign of curial favour.³⁶ Of course, the papal registers are not a complete record of papal correspondence, and it is probable that there were more letters to the king that have now been lost.³⁷ Yet, even allowing for deficiencies in the source material, when one compares the total of letters with those we know were issued to, and about, Frederick, it reveals that John's communications with Honorius were relatively poor.

Honorius is recorded to have addressed 36 letters to Frederick, more than four times the number sent to John, and the emperor's influence on the issue of a great many more means that the total number of papal letters sent to and in connection with Frederick dwarfs those that were sent to, or made mention of, John.³⁸ Similarly, Honorius addressed 23 documents during his pontificate to King Andrew II of Hungary, who was originally his favoured candidate for the leadership of the Fifth Crusade, and was later also sought after as a recruit for the Crusade of Frederick II.³⁹ A closer geographic comparison can be made by considering papal letters despatched to the rulers of the kingdom of Cyprus. Honorius is also recorded to have sent only eight letters to King Hugh I (who died on 10 January 1218 during the Fifth Crusade) and to the regency government of the queen mother, Alice of Champagne, and her lieutenant, Philip of Ibelin, for King Henry I.⁴⁰ Unlike the kingdom of Jerusalem under John, however, the kingdom of Cyprus, which suffered from internal power struggles during the regency, could offer little in the way of support for the crusade to the Holy Land after 1218.⁴¹ From this point, in terms of their potential to help recover the Holy Land, the rulers of Cyprus were essentially impotent: that John only received the same number of letters is suggestive. In any case, the obvious implication to draw from this is that John and Honorius were not close. It was not until the pope took John under his wing as a rector of the Papal State in January 1227

³² A point which has not been noted before. Pressutti, 1: 1, 673, 1580, 2320, 2338, 2610; 2: 3931, 6204.

³³ Pressutti, 1: 2320, 2610; 2: 6204.

³⁴ Pressutti, 1: 2610.

³⁵ Pressutti, 1: 1580, 2338.

³⁶ Pressutti, 1: 1, 673; 2: 3931.

³⁷ Harry Bresslau, *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre für Deutschland und Italien*. 2nd edn. 3 vols. (Leipzig: Veit, 1912–15), 1: 121; Paul Rabikauskas, *Diplomatica pontificia*. 6th edn (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1998), 82.

³⁸ Pressutti, 1: 482, 1862, 1867, 1869, 2071, 2207, 2372, 2392, 2650, 2732, 2855, 3378, 3462, 3504; 2: 3519, 3581, 4408, 4460, 4905, 5044, 5566, 5655, 5799, 5828, 5967, 5983, 6023, 6031, 6058, 6144, 6146, 6147, 6149, 6202, 6221, 6249. To compare the total number of letters which concerned or made mention of Frederick and John, see Pressutti, 2: pp. 619, 644.

³⁹ Pressutti, 1: 291, 330, 684, 1911, 1912, 3256, 3296; 2: 3764, 4262, 4266, 4299, 4799, 4800, 4855, 4910, 5294, 5312, 5532, 5627, 5702, 5831, 5856, 6156.

⁴⁰ Pressutti, 1: 679, 1522; 2: 3627, 4212, 4998, 5361, 5813, 5825. On the regency, see Peter W. Edbury, *The Kingdom of Cyprus and the Crusades, 1191–1374* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 48–51.

⁴¹ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, 75.

that he showed the king any real sign of favour, and even this was merely a consolation prize for the deposed king.

It may be speculated that the apparent lack of confidence in John could have been based on reports reaching the curia about his problems with the Syrian barons in the years prior to the Fifth Crusade. The very first letter entered into Honorius' register was issued on 25 July 1216 and concerned his accession and the crusade.⁴² The letter was addressed to John, the patriarch of Jerusalem and the people of the Holy Land, the patriarch of Antioch, and the masters of the Hospitallers and Templars. Despite the prominence of the letter in the pope's register, and its significance for the pope as his opportunity to stamp his authority on the crusade that he had inherited from Innocent III, its importance to John, aside from learning of the change in popes, was negligible. While, from the beginning of his pontificate, Honorius began despatching letters to Western crusade contingents to discuss their preparations and departure dates, the letter to John simply notified him that the crusade was still coming.⁴³ What this suggests is that, in the papal conception of how the crusade would unfold, John's role was passive, to await its arrival, rather than to assume a leading role in its planning and command.

This interpretation finds support in the evidence from 1217, when the first crusade contingents were setting sail for the Holy Land. Honorius seems to have pinned his hopes on King Andrew II of Hungary fulfilling the role of overall leader of the crusade and, as he would do again after 1225, Honorius joined with the lay power and used papal letters and the manipulation of information to attempt to exclude John. On 24 July 1217, Honorius issued a short letter to John, the patriarch of Jerusalem, and the masters of the Hospitallers and Templars, which informed them that Andrew, Duke Leopold IV of Austria and all the other crusaders were going to meet on Cyprus on 8 September to plan the Fifth Crusade – as Andrew had already informed John through a letter of his own.⁴⁴ John was invited to attend or to send messengers so that the crusaders might benefit from his counsel, but the very location of the meeting – which sent a pointed message to John – signalled that, by scheduling the meeting before the expedition arrived in the kingdom of Jerusalem, Andrew and Honorius were trying to exclude him from making key strategic decisions about the direction of the crusade.⁴⁵ There were, however, food shortages in the kingdom of Jerusalem and it is possible that the location of the meeting was justified on those grounds.⁴⁶ It is also worth remembering that after the Fifth Crusade Frederick II, King Louis IX of France and Lord Edward, the future king of England, all arranged to break their journeys to the East at Cyprus.⁴⁷

In spite of this, there is good reason to believe that the proposed meeting on Cyprus in 1217 was arranged as a snub to John and to remove him from any possibility of leadership. Andrew's

⁴² Reg. Vat. 9, f. 1r; Pressutti, 1: 1.

⁴³ Compare the letters sent early in Honorius' reign to the French contingent, the crusaders of Cologne and King Andrew II of Hungary, for instance, which deal with specific preparations: Pressutti, 1: 14, 284, 291, 330, 371.

⁴⁴ Reg. Vat. 9, f. 138r: 'Cum karissimi in Christo filii Ungarie rex illustris dux Austrie ac alii multi magnates magnamines et magnifici ad subsidium Terre Sancte inspirante Domino aspirantes in nativitate beate Marie Deo propitio apud Ciprum disposuerint convenire, ut secundum tue discretionis consilium in negotio Christi ordinate procedant, sicut idem rex tue celsitudini per suas litteras dicitur intimare, serenitatem rem, rogamus et monemus attentes quatinus sicut causam Christi zelaris, eis illuc per te vel sollempnes nuntios occurrere non omittas impensurus eisdem, prout tua noscitur specialiter interesse consilium et auxilium oportunum'; Pressutti, 1: 673. Compare also the similar letter sent on the same day to a number of Italian clergy informing them of the meeting and urging them to preach the crusade: Pressutti, 1: 672.

⁴⁵ See also Perry, *John of Brienne*, 91 and n. 7.

⁴⁶ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 130.

⁴⁷ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, 74–5.

subsequent attempt to exert his authority as leader by holding the first crusade council in his royal tent is also suggestive.⁴⁸ In addition, Hugh I of Cyprus had been at odds with the king of Jerusalem since 1213, when he was accused by Pope Innocent III of assisting rebels against John, and of incarcerating and mistreating a group of Jerusalemite vassals – a conflict between the two kings which was still unresolved in 1215/16.⁴⁹ When Hugh joined the crusade in 1217 he closely aligned himself with Andrew II; and both quarrelled with John at the end of year, before leaving the crusader host in each other's company.⁵⁰ In light of this, it is likely that some form of understanding existed between Honorius and Andrew (and perhaps Hugh as well) about the desired direction of the Fifth Crusade.

The papal–Hungarian machinations were, nevertheless, to no avail, because the king of Hungary abandoned the crusade in January 1218, and soon afterwards John was elected as leader.⁵¹ In the pope's eyes, however, John's position was an interim one because, as Powell argues, once Honorius had conducted serious negotiations with Frederick over the fulfilment of his crusade vow, 'from this point on, whatever other arrangements might be made to meet the needs of the crusade, they were only temporary expedients pending the arrival of Frederick II, who now assumed the character of the real leader of the crusade.'⁵² Honorius was therefore attempting to steer the crusade away from John's leadership throughout the campaign: his support for Andrew II was just the beginning.

If any latent dissatisfaction with John did exist at the papal curia, it would have come to the fore in 1220 when he left the crusade, partly to pursue his claim to the throne of Armenia which he possessed through his (new) wife Stephanie and their son.⁵³ A number of different explanations have been given for John's actions at Easter 1220. Donovan emphasised the need to defend the kingdom of Jerusalem from al-Mu'azzam, and Mayer drew attention to John's anger over not being granted outright control of the captured city of Damietta, as well as his dwindling funds.⁵⁴ It is clear from the eyewitness testimony of the chronicle of Oliver of Paderborn, and also the later account in the 'Ernoul' continuation of William of Tyre, that the kingdom was indeed under attack at this time.⁵⁵ Yet the curialists Oliver and Jacques de Vitry (also an eyewitness) were both critical of John for abandoning the crusade to return north, and Oliver explicitly attributed this to John's dynastic interests in Armenia.⁵⁶ Runciman followed this interpretation and underlined John's attempts to press his right to the throne.⁵⁷ Recently, Perry has concluded that John's decision to leave was influenced most by the need to defend his vulnerable kingdom against al-Mu'azzam, although the king also used the opportunity to attempt to press his claim.⁵⁸

⁴⁸ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 91.

⁴⁹ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, 46.

⁵⁰ Edbury, *Kingdom of Cyprus*, 47.

⁵¹ Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 133, 141.

⁵² Powell, *Anatomy of a Crusade*, 112, although I disagree with the argument that this took place by summer 1217 – see above.

⁵³ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 79–80.

⁵⁴ Donovan, *Pelagius and the Fifth Crusade*, 71; Mayer, *Crusades*, 225.

⁵⁵ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, in *Die Schriften des Kölner Domscholasters, späteren Bischofs von Paderborn und Kardinal-Bischofs von S. Sabina*, ed. H. Hoogeweg (Tübingen: Gedruckt für den litterarischen Verein in Stuttgart, 1894), 244; Louis de Mas Latrie, ed., *Chronique d'Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier* (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1871), 423.

⁵⁶ Oliver of Paderborn, *Historia Damiatina*, 248–50; Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la Cinquième Croisade*, ed. R.B.C. Huygens, trans. G. Duchet-Suchaux (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), 164.

⁵⁷ Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 3: 164–5.

⁵⁸ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 111–14.

In response to the king's petition, the pope had issued confirmation of John's right to the throne of Armenia on 2 January 1220.⁵⁹ Whilst certainly an indicator of support for the king, one should be wary of overstating its importance as a sign from the curia of special favour for John's cause. The document confirming his claim was in the concise form of a letter *Cum a nobis*: a common letter rather than a bespoke curial production, this form 'was used for almost every kind of confirmation'.⁶⁰ Despite Runciman's assertion to the contrary, this document did not grant papal 'permission to leave the Crusade and visit Armenia'; it merely confirmed that the king possessed a valid claim.⁶¹ It was unlikely that the pope thought John would personally leave the crusade to press home his newly confirmed rights whilst the campaign was under way. When news of his departure from the army reached the papal curia, Honorius was disappointed with what he heard. In a letter to John on 11 August 1220, the pope ordered him, under threat of anathema, not to attack Armenia or any other Christians and counselled him to return to the crusade army to finish the expedition.⁶² Regardless of whether the king's Armenian concerns had been pivotal in his decision to leave, the mood at the papal curia, based on the information circulating there, was one of dismay. By the time John returned to the expedition in July 1221, just in time for the final march towards Cairo, he had been absent from the crusade for around 15 months: more than a quarter of the entire four-year campaign. It is clear, though, from the letter of August 1220 that the legate on the crusade, Pelagius, had frequently praised John's performance in his reports to the pope. On the other hand, Jacques de Vitry's letter to the pope of 18 April 1221 had implied biting criticism of the king: John had 'deserted the army'.⁶³ Therefore, based on his performance during the crusade, and the subsequent reports of returning curialists after the expedition, Honorius' opinion of John must have been mixed.

In contrast, while Honorius had never seemed particularly enamoured with John, he had worked closely with Frederick over his crusade since the turn of 1218/19, and there is good reason to believe that a rapport existed between the pope and the emperor. The anonymous Cistercian author of the *Chronicle of Santa Maria de Ferrara* provides another piece of information – that has yet to be noted by scholars – when he states that the pope 'had the greatest friendship with the emperor'.⁶⁴ Weight should be attributed to this chronicle since the author was well informed about curial affairs, and was composing the chronicle, which finishes in 1228, contemporaneously comparatively near at hand, in Teano, so was well placed

⁵⁹ Reg. Vat. 10, f. 161v: 'Cum a nobis petitur, etc. usque, effectum. Sane tua nobis serenitas supplicavit, ut regnum Armenie quod ad te ratione karissime in Christo filie nostre H. regine uxoris tue hereditario iure asseris pertinere, tibi tuisque heredibus confirmare de benignitate sedis apostolice dignemur. Nos igitur tuis iustis postulationibus grato concurrentes assensu, ius quod in ipso regno habere dinosceris, sicut illud rationabiliter obtines, tibi tuisque heredibus auctoritate apostolica confirmamus'; Pressutti, 1: 2320.

⁶⁰ Jane E. Sayers, *Papal Government and England During the Pontificate of Honorius III (1216–1227)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 104.

⁶¹ Runciman, *History of the Crusades*, 3: 164.

⁶² Reg. Vat. 11, f. 7r: 'Licet igitur confidamus quod tu hec prudenter attendens evitabis aliquid attemptare per quod perire ac evacuari posset totus labor quem hactenus pro Terra Sancta subiit populus Christianus, ex habundanti tamen sub obtentu gratie divine ac nostre et sub anathematis pena tibi auctoritate presentium districtissime inhibemus, ne hoc tempore aliquatenus arma moveas contra ipsos Armenos aut quoslibet alios Christianos, sed studeas ut tota Christianitas ultramarina in unitate consistat, et venerabili fratre nostro Pelagio Albanensi episcopo apostolice sedis legato qui strenuitatem tuam frequenter suis nobis litteris commendavit, sicut persone nostre reverenter intendens, studeas quod commune populi Christiani negotium desideratum largiente Domino consequatur effectum, postmodum tuis specialibus commodis operam decentius utiliusque daturus'; Pressutti, 1: 2610.

⁶³ Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la Cinquième Croisade*, 164.

⁶⁴ *Ignoti monachi Cisterciensis*, 38: '... [Honorius] habuit amicitiam maximam cum imperatore Frederico ...'

temporally and geographically to comment with accuracy.⁶⁵ The chronicler also had a foot in both papal and imperial camps. He devoted fulsome praise to Honorius, whom he noted had done so much to support the Cistercian Order through the issue of papal grants; and he also authored a favourable account of Frederick (who had links with the monastery and visited in 1229) in relation to his excommunication by Gregory IX in 1227.⁶⁶ It is possible of course that the chronicler glossed the papal–imperial relationship as part of an effort to reconcile the monastery’s occasionally competing interests – he was keen to avoid blaming either Gregory or Frederick for the excommunication of the latter, for instance, and instead exculpated both by attributing it to a misunderstanding.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, the chronicler’s assessment of the positive relationship between the pope and emperor should be given due consideration because, in spite of a few more heated exchanges, it correlates with the content and general tone of the diplomatic correspondence over the course of Honorius’ pontificate. Persuasive evidence of a strong papal–imperial bond can also be found in the rapid rise of the Teutonic Order around the time that Honorius crowned the emperor in November 1220. The Order had close links with the German empire and the master, Hermann von Salza, played an important role in the negotiations at the papal curia prior to the coronation. Between December 1220 and March 1221, Honorius granted 57 documents to the Order, of which 34 were issued in a period of only six days between 15 and 21 January 1221.⁶⁸ In one papal privilege issued to the Order on 17 April 1222, Honorius stated that it was granted ‘as a special gift’ in response to a request of Frederick on the day of his coronation.⁶⁹ If we therefore accept the statement found in the *Chronicle of Santa Maria de Ferraria* as broadly accurate, it casts papal–imperial relations in a new light. Scholars have often portrayed Frederick as taking advantage of Honorius, and while it is certain that he was the driving force in the direction of papal crusade policy (to a greater extent than the pope himself, who generally played a more reactive role), interpreting their relationship as sincere – even if sometimes strained – illuminates why the pope was so accommodating.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ On the chronicle, see Lorenzo Lozzi Gallo, ‘Chronica Romanorum pontificum et imperatorum ac de rebus in Apulia gestis’, in *The Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicle*, ed. Graeme Dunphy, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1: 412. Regarding the chronicler’s knowledge of curial affairs and his reliability, see Maria L. Taylor, ‘The Election of Innocent III’, in *The Church and Sovereignty, c.590–1918: Essays in Honour of Michael Wilks*, ed. Diana Wood. Studies in Church History Subsidia 9 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 98, 102, 108.

⁶⁶ For Honorius’ support of the Order: *Ignoti monachi Cisterciensis*, 38. On Frederick’s excommunication: *Ignoti monachi Cisterciensis*, 39. For mention of his visit to the monastery in 1229: Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 285. I have been unable to examine a copy of Giovanna Bonardi, ‘La cronaca di Santa Maria di Ferraria (741–1228): struttura, fonti e contesto storico di una cronaca del regno’ (PhD diss., Università degli Studi di Palermo, 2001): the abstract notes that Frederick enjoyed very good relations with the monastery, even during his excommunication, <http://www.rmojs.unina.it/index.php/rm/article/view/234/227> (Accessed 5 February 2014).

⁶⁷ *Ignoti monachi Cisterciensis*, 39.

⁶⁸ Barbara Bombi, ‘L’Ordine Teutonico nell’Italia centrale: la casa romana dell’Ordine e l’ufficio del procuratore generale’, in *L’Ordine Teutonico nel Mediterraneo: atti del Convegno internazionale di studio Torre Alemanna (Cerignola) – Mesagne – Lecce, 16–18 ottobre 2003*, ed. Hubert Houben (Galatina: Mario Congedo Editore, 2004), 205. See also Morton, *Teutonic Knights*, 37.

⁶⁹ Morton, *Teutonic Knights*, 40; E. Strehlke, ed., *Tabulae ordinis Theutonici: ex tabularii regii Berolinensis codice potissimum* (Berlin: apud Weidmannos, 1869), 322 (no. 368).

⁷⁰ See the historiography above. On the reactive character of Honorius’ crusade policy, see Thomas W. Smith, ‘Honorius III and the Crusade: Responsive Papal Government Versus the Memory of his Predecessors’, in *The Church on its Past*, eds. Peter D. Clarke and Charlotte Methuen. Studies in Church History 49 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2013), 99–109; Smith, ‘Pope Honorius and the Holy Land Crusades’, especially 325–7.

That is not to say that relations between the two were always easy: they were not. The pope's frustration and disappointment in a letter of 1 October 1219 at Frederick missing his crusade deadlines, for instance, are palpable.⁷¹ Yet even when reprimanding the emperor, Honorius was careful not to alienate him and still showed Frederick a certain amount of regard. In a letter of 13 June 1221, censuring the emperor for his crusade delays, the pope began his letter with an explanation that he was proceeding 'out of sincere affection', and alluded to biblical passages in which God chastises those whom he loves (Proverbs 3:12; Hebrews 12:6).⁷² Indeed, the opening clause of a letter addressed to Frederick on 20 March 1220 glowed with warmth 'for the most beloved son' and rejoiced that the Church had 'so excellent and so great a son' – and this at a time when it has been claimed that the pope was experiencing difficult relations with the emperor.⁷³ Although this is formulaic rhetoric, the very use of such language is nevertheless an important indicator of papal attitudes – the significance of the use and omission of greeting clauses in papal letters is proof enough of that.⁷⁴

This generally positive relationship provides the background to Honorius' role in Frederick's seizure of the crown of Jerusalem because it lends weight to the notion that the pope would have privately favoured the deposition. At the least it indicates that, after the event, Honorius was more inclined to support Frederick than he was John: after 1220, John was probably perceived at the curia as a disappointing crusader king. The earlier history of Honorius' relations with John therefore reveals a possible motive for supporting his replacement, as well as evidence that the pope counselled Frederick to marry Isabella in the first place. When the actions of the pope in response to the putsch are located in this context, Honorius had reason to welcome Frederick's deposition of John: it cleared the way for Frederick's crusade. Honorius was not simply bullied into acceptance by the emperor.

The deposition in 1225 and its aftermath

The marriage and deposition took place after the third papal–imperial colloquium to discuss the crusade, which began on 25 July 1225, at San Germano, where a number of strict financial and spiritual penalties were set in case Frederick failed to fulfil his vow.⁷⁵ A matter of weeks later Frederick married Isabella by proxy in the Church of the Holy Cross, Acre. After she had been crowned as Queen Isabella II in Tyre, Frederick arranged for her to be brought back to the West and married her in person on 9 November in Brindisi Cathedral.⁷⁶ It appears, therefore, that San Germano was the catalyst for the marriage, and although Honorius did not attend in person (he delegated the responsibility to the legates *a latere* Pelagius and Guala), it is significant to note this example of papal influence at a key moment before John's overthrow. We do not know whether the pope was privy to the emperor's intentions, although in most analyses it has

⁷¹ Reg. Vat. 10, f. 132v: '... expetivimus et expectavimus excusationes probabiles ...'; Pressutti, 1: 2207.

⁷² Reg. Vat. 11, f. 141v: 'Si aliqua tue celsitudini scribimus, que utcumque amara videntur, cum ea ex sincero amore procedant, egre ferre non debes, sed illa te decet potius omnimodis acceptare, quia pater filium quem diligit corripit, et Dominus quos amat, arguit et castigat'; Pressutti, 1: 3462.

⁷³ Reg. Vat. 10, f. 169v: 'Sinceris, fili karissime, fulgebat affectibus, et ferventis animi desiderium exponebat pagina, quam misisti, devotione plena, humilitate non vacua; que dum perceptorum beneficiorum memoriam replicat, et offert ad gratiarum vicissitudinem apparatus. Habet mater ecclesia in tali ac tanto filio, ut gaudeat de collatis, habet etiam providere, ut et in conferendis de adiectionis plenitudine nil omittat'; Pressutti, 1: 2372. Cf. Van Cleve, *Emperor Frederick II*, 114–16.

⁷⁴ R.L. Poole, *Lectures on the History of the Papal Chancery Down to the Time of Innocent III* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), 42.

⁷⁵ See Stürmer, *Friedrich II.*, 2: 95.

⁷⁶ Stürmer, *Friedrich II.*, 2: 96; Perry, *John of Brienne*, 133.

traditionally been maintained that the pope was not only caught off guard by Frederick's actions, but that he was also implacably opposed to them until his death in March 1227.⁷⁷

Frederick's bid for the throne was as swift as it was conclusive. It was also suspiciously easy. He procured, seemingly without any difficulty, the homage of two of the leading Syrian barons who had accompanied Isabella to the West, Daniel of Tenremonde, lord of Adelon, and Balian, lord of Sidon; he then sent the bishop of Melfi with 300 knights back to the Holy Land to secure the homage of the other barons.⁷⁸ Clearly these actions were planned, given how smoothly this was achieved, and Ross has argued convincingly that 'the absence of any such opposition reinforces the suggestion that Frederick's appropriation of royal authority was anticipated and probably welcomed by the Franks.'⁷⁹ It is important to note the probable presence amongst the conspirators in the wedding entourage of the curialist Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre, and also that, from 1225, he joined other leaders from the Latin East at the imperial court.⁸⁰ His involvement provides another papal link with the coup, significant because of his history of close contact with the pope during the Fifth Crusade and his criticism of John's departure from the army in his letter of April 1221.⁸¹ It is therefore not impossible to imagine that Honorius might also have had prior knowledge of the plans for the putsch through a member of the Syrian ruling elite such as Jacques.

After the emperor had comprehensively deposed John, he also forced the king – in a move which Perry and Claverie both attribute to papal pressure – to surrender the money that Philip Augustus had bequeathed to him for the defence of the Holy Land.⁸² It seems though that John had become more of an embarrassing problem for Frederick and Honorius, a loose end to be tied up, than an insurmountable obstacle to maintenance of the new status quo. The half-hearted way in which Honorius subsequently went about 'defending' John's right to the throne fits with such an interpretation. The idea in the current historiography that the pope stalwartly championed John's beleaguered claim to the throne is based on two pieces of evidence. The first is the papacy's refusal to award Frederick the title 'king of Jerusalem' in the address clauses of its letters until August 1231, despite the fact that Frederick claimed the title 'Romanorum imperator semper augustus et Ierusalem et Sicilie rex' from December 1225 until his death in 1250.⁸³ Secondly, there is a pair of papal letters which supposedly sought to defend John's right.⁸⁴ Yet a re-examination of this evidence shows that Honorius' outrage on John's behalf has been exaggerated.

Turning to examine the two papal letters first, it becomes clear that they are not an emphatic declaration of John's claim to the kingdom of Jerusalem, but rather an attempt to mediate between the two kings. As Perry has noted: 'It was not until a full six months had passed that the pope broached the matter in a letter to the emperor, and even then, he did so only briefly.'⁸⁵ This

⁷⁷ Clausen, *Papst Honorius III.*, 203–5; Mann, *Lives of the Popes*, 13: 77–8; Donovan, *Pelagius and the Fifth Crusade*, 109; Van Cleve, *Emperor Frederick II*, 165, 167; Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 153; Perry, *John of Brienne*, 124.

⁷⁸ Ross, 'Frederick II', 152. See also Olaf B. Rader, *Friedrich II., der Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron: eine Biographie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2010), 398; Riley-Smith, *Feudal Nobility*, 160.

⁷⁹ Ross, 'Frederick II', 153. See also Edbury, *John of Ibelin*, 41.

⁸⁰ Ross, 'Frederick II', 152–3.

⁸¹ See above and Jacques de Vitry, *Lettres de la Cinquième Croisade*, 164.

⁸² Perry, *John of Brienne*, 137; Claverie, *Honorius III et l'Orient*, 116.

⁸³ Rudolf Hiestand, 'Jerusalem et Sicilie rex – Zur Titulatur Friedrichs II.', *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 52 (1996): 181, 184; Van Cleve, *Emperor Frederick II*, 167; Perry, *John of Brienne*, 139, 156.

⁸⁴ Pressutti, 2: 5967, 6202.

⁸⁵ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 139.

first letter was addressed to Frederick at the beginning of May 1226. The text of the letter itself was very lengthy – running to more than four leaves in the abbreviated copy in the papal register – and chiefly expressed Honorius’ many complaints about the treatment of the Church and clergy in the emperor’s territories.⁸⁶ Honorius referred only briefly to the emperor’s handling of John, towards the end of the letter. Despite the suggestion in Pressutti’s summary of this letter that Honorius styled John ‘king of Jerusalem’, this was not the case: the pope only referred to him neutrally as ‘your distinguished father-in-law’.⁸⁷ The significance of this as another subtle indicator of the pope’s lacklustre support for John has yet to be appreciated. In addition, in this letter Honorius did not pressure Frederick to restore John to his kingdom, but merely sought a reconciliation between the two for the good of the Holy Land and the forthcoming crusade.⁸⁸ The reference to the deposition in this letter is strikingly casual, and the pope focused on the damage to Frederick’s reputation, rather than taking him to task over any injustice in the coup. Similarly Morton has noted that after the deposition ‘Honorius did not officially censure Frederick’.⁸⁹ The evidence from the letter of May 1226 therefore suggests that Honorius had, at least privately, accepted John’s removal by this point at the very latest, if not before.

The second letter was addressed to Frederick on 27 January 1227 and this time took as its main theme the dispossession of John. Although Honorius did refer to John as ‘king of Jerusalem’ in this letter, again the text only urged the emperor, for the sake of the Holy Land, to restore John to full imperial favour and to be reconciled to him, adding that he was sending the Cistercian abbot of St Martin of Viterbo to discuss the matter.⁹⁰ Honorius deployed rhetoric in the *narratio* clause that was suggestive of restoring John to the kingdom in some ruling capacity:

To whom more faithful would it be possible to entrust the kingdom of Jerusalem? Who would be more welcome to the faithful living there? Who is more terrifying to the infidel? Who is more useful to the whole business of the Holy Land?⁹¹

Yet it has not previously been acknowledged that the pope presented this as reported speech. In other words, he made the subtle distinction that these were not his personal thoughts, but the

⁸⁶ Reg. Vat. 13, ff. 124r–26r; Pressutti, 2: 5967.

⁸⁷ Pressutti, 2: 5967. Compare with the text given in the note directly below.

⁸⁸ Reg. Vat. 13, ff. 125v–26r: ‘Ad hec *de viro egregio socero tuo* si ad nostram pervenisset notitiam quod de hiis que tibi facere debuit obmisisset, nostra eum non preteriret monitio quem tibi desideramus acceptum et te illi potissime gratiosum. In quo movet multorum corda miratio, qui cum consueverint alii crescere ex affinitate maiorum, iste non sine multorum scandalo, non sine Terre Sancte dispendio, non sine tui nominis lesione decrevisse videtur. Et quidem hiis similia magnificorum principum gesta non continent, sublimium mores ignorant, liberalium largitas non acceptat. Non sic illius Terre procuratur utilitas, non sic ad eius subsidium bellatores strenui advocantur’ (my emphasis); Pressutti, 2: 5967.

⁸⁹ Morton, *Teutonic Knights*, 52.

⁹⁰ Reg. Vat. 13, f. 164r: ‘Denique per factum inter te ac ipsum regem dissidium multorum devotio circa Terre Sancte subsidium, ut dicitur refrigescit, quam facies recalescere, si ad ipsum regem tuum ut decet vultum et animum curaveris serenare. Desiderantes ergo hanc quasi quandam nebulam a tui serenitate nominis removere, ac simul pro ipsius Terre Sancte subsidio cui tua et eisdem regis reconciliatio est plurimum necessaria satagentes, serenitatem tuam monemus, rogamus, et obsecramus in Domino Ihesu Christo postulantes pro munere speciali, quatinus tecum ipse recogitans quam absurdum sit tantum et talem virum occasione affinitatis tue magnificentie deprimi, cum solam familiaritatem tue sublimitatis adeptos, per eam deceat exaltari, ac sepedicte Terre Sancte utilitatem attendens, dictum regem in imperialis gratie plenitudinem reassumas, eumque tibi sic efficaciter reconcilies, quod tui serenitatem animi erga eum ipsa exhibitione operis manifestes’; Pressutti, 2: 6202.

⁹¹ Translated in Perry, *John of Brienne*, 141.

things that he had heard from others, possibly distancing himself from their message.⁹² In any case, the pope did not add his own voice to this rhetorical clamour.

Honorius' justification in both letters for arranging a conciliation was the damage to the enthusiasm of those signed with the cross, which, according to the pope, was 'cooling' as a result of the affair. It is possible that the concern for the crusade, rather than the principle of John's position, was the pope's main focus in issuing the letters, although it seems likely that he also chose it as a mutually acceptable reason to seek a resolution to the situation. If one were to read into the rhetoric in the letter that the pope truly desired John's re-instatement as rightful king of Jerusalem, such an interpretation would be undermined by two further papal documents also issued on 27 January 1227, which appointed John as rector of the patrimony of Tuscia in the Papal State.⁹³ This appointment was the incontrovertible acknowledgement that his cause was exhausted – the deposed king would not get his kingdom back – and it sent the clear message that 'Honorius was not prepared really to turn on Frederick to force him to relinquish the crown of Jerusalem.'⁹⁴

At first glance it seems particularly strange not only that the letters regarding the kingdom of Jerusalem and the Papal State were issued on the same day, but also that this more serious letter about the soured relations between Frederick and John came after the curt and rather inconsequential mention of the matter in the letter issued to the emperor nine months previously. This second letter to Frederick only makes sense if one suspects John's influence behind its issue (the grant of control over Tuscia to John is evidence that, whilst he was in Italy and seeking papal support, the king was obviously in much closer contact with Honorius), and one interprets the pope's action as a plea for *reconciliation*, rather than *restoration*.⁹⁵

The reference to John as king of Jerusalem in the letter of 27 January brings us to the other evidence cited in support of the notion that Honorius was vehemently opposed to the coup: the refusal of the papacy to award the title of 'king of Jerusalem' to Frederick until 1231. It has been argued that both Honorius and Gregory IX withheld the title from 1225 onwards.⁹⁶ Whilst this holds true for the address clauses of the papal letters, it has been overlooked that Honorius *did* in fact refer to Frederick as king of Jerusalem as early as 5 January 1227 in a *forma pacis* document issued to the Lombard League.⁹⁷ After Frederick had convened the Diet of Cremona at Easter 1226 to discuss the crusade, heresy and the recognition of imperial rights, the former members of the Lombard League hastily reformed to meet a perceived threat from the emperor and began blockading the Alpine passes.⁹⁸ Perry has drawn special attention to the role of John in this affair, who was in Lombardy at this time and deliberately creating opposition to the emperor.⁹⁹ Frederick was desirous of peace and requested that Honorius mediate between the empire and the League so that he could proceed with his crusade

⁹² Reg. Vat. 13, f. 164r: 'Omnes qui hec audiunt vehementer admirantur et dicunt ... [rhetorical questions on the Holy Land] ... Hec et similia parvi loquuntur et magni, admirantes super huiusmodi facto, et illud ut loquamur verius detestantes'; Pressutti, 2: 6202.

⁹³ Pressutti, 2: 6203, 6204.

⁹⁴ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 139.

⁹⁵ See also Claverie, *Honorius III et l'Orient*, 116.

⁹⁶ Hiestand, 'Zur Titulatur Friedrichs II.', 181, 184; Van Cleve, *Emperor Frederick II*, 167; Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 153; Perry, *John of Brienne*, 139, 156.

⁹⁷ Reg. Vat. 13, f. 157; Pressutti, 2: 6145.

⁹⁸ Abulafia, *Frederick II*, 154–7.

⁹⁹ Perry, *John of Brienne*, 140.

preparations.¹⁰⁰ Thus the pope stepped into the breach as intermediary, inviting representatives from the League to present themselves at the papal curia.¹⁰¹

Once terms had been decided upon, they were drawn up at the papal curia in the final *forma pacis* documents and despatched to Frederick and the League to copy out and seal.¹⁰² In the template of the peace agreement that Honorius sent to the League, he instructed them on the proper form with which to address Frederick, which, remarkably, included the title ‘king of Jerusalem’: ‘Serenissimo et excellentissimo Domino suo, Frederico Dei gratia invictissimo Romanorum imperatori, semper augusto et regi Ierusalimitani atque Sicilie illustrissimo’.¹⁰³ That the papal letter in which this title was awarded was also the model *forma pacis*, the authoritative and binding legal document to bring a permanent end to hostilities, and that John’s involvement in the rebellion meant that he might have seen a copy himself, only increases its significance. Here was the papacy formulating the final text of the peace agreement and formally recognising Frederick as the rightful ‘king of Jerusalem’.

The title was perhaps included to prevent any dispute over the acceptance of the document by the emperor.¹⁰⁴ Two papal letters issued to the League at the same time as the *forma pacis* may support this notion, since they referred to Frederick but without employing the style ‘king of Jerusalem’.¹⁰⁵ It could be significant, however, that when copying one of these original letters into Honorius’ register, the scribe made a series of blunders when it came to Frederick’s title: he included the word *semper* twice by mistake, left a noticeable gap between these two occurrences, and missed out *illustrem*, which was inserted later in a superscript notation in what appears to be a different hand.¹⁰⁶ Subsequently (and tellingly), when making the register copy of Frederick’s half of the peace agreement, which opened with the emperor’s title, the scribe truncated it completely, so that it reads simply ‘Fredericus et cetera’.¹⁰⁷ This was not normal practice in Honorius’ chancery. A comprehensive search of the manuscripts of the papal registers for letters issued to and about Frederick between 1224 and 1227 reveals that it was standard practice to include Frederick’s *full* title in the register copies, albeit in an abbreviated form.¹⁰⁸ Most references to Frederick abbreviated his title to variations on: ‘F’ illust’ Romanor’ imp’ator semp’ aug’ et rex Sicilie’. In only one other document is he referred to, omitting some of his other titles, as simply ‘F’ imp’atore’.¹⁰⁹ These apparent irregularities

¹⁰⁰ Björn K.U. Weiler, *Henry III of England and the Staufien Empire, 1216–1272* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), 29.

¹⁰¹ Marco Rainini, ‘Guala da Bergamo e la curia romana (1219–1230): relazioni, incarichi e problemi di definizione’, in *Legati e delegati papali: profili, ambiti d’azione e tipologie di intervento nei secoli XII–XIII*, eds. Maria Pia Alberzoni and Claudia Zey (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2012), 139 n. 36.

¹⁰² Stürmer, *Friedrich II.*, 2: 113.

¹⁰³ My italics. Reg. Vat. 13, f. 157r; Pressutti, 2: 6145.

¹⁰⁴ On the importance of the use of the correct style, Pierre Chaplais, *English Diplomatic Practice in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Press, 2003), 102–3.

¹⁰⁵ Pressutti, 2: 6142, 6145.

¹⁰⁶ Reg. Vat. 13, f. 157r: ‘... Fredericum Romanorum imperatorem illustrem [superscript insertion; different hand?] semper [gap] semper [sic] augustum et regem Sicilie ...’; Pressutti, 2: 6145. This scribal error is not mentioned in Carl Rodenberg’s (generally reliable) printed edition, which has seen much greater use by scholars than the register manuscripts: Carl Rodenberg, ed., *Epistolae saeculi XIII e regestis pontificum Romanorum*, vol. 1. Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae saeculi XIII, 1 (Berlin: apud Weidmannos, 1883), 250–1 (no. 331).

¹⁰⁷ Reg. Vat. 13, f. 157v; Pressutti, 2: 6144.

¹⁰⁸ See Pressutti, 2: 4792, 4831, 4839, 4903, 4904, 4919, 4920, 4979, 4980, 5044, 5081, 5102, 5566, 5575, 5610, 5655, 5799, 5828, 5967, 5983, 6023, 6031, 6036, 6058, 6059, 6060, 6132, 6133, 6147, 6149, 6155, 6156, 6160, 6202, 6271, 6280.

¹⁰⁹ Pressutti, 2: 5974.

in the recording of Frederick's title in the papal register from this batch of documents may reflect the contemporary contention over the title of 'king of Jerusalem'. It is most probable that the papal chancery staff also awarded Frederick the title 'king of Jerusalem' when they drew up his half of the *forma pacis*, but then covered their tracks by truncating his title in the register copy.

By advising the League to address the emperor as 'king of Jerusalem' (and most probably granting the title in Frederick's half of the *forma* as well), the pope reinforced the emperor's position as both *de facto* and *de jure* ruler of the kingdom. The evidence from the *forma pacis* makes it quite clear that the papal curia was not intransigently opposed to the formal recognition of Frederick as king of Jerusalem at this time. If Honorius had been utterly averse to referring to Frederick as king, as has been supposed, and had completely banned the use of the title in the papal chancery, then there would have been other options available in the composition and recording of the *forma*. For instance, he could have sent the original document without the style 'king of Jerusalem', but given the bearer of the *forma* an oral message with instructions for its inclusion in the final document composed by the League.¹¹⁰ Or the copy of the League's *forma* made in the papal register could have abbreviated the address clause to 'Frederico Dei gratia invictissimo Romanorum imperatori *et cetera*', in a similar manner to the register copy of Frederick's version of the document. The papal registers were, after all, public documents of sorts, and could be consulted by petitioners.¹¹¹ If Honorius hoped to keep his use of Frederick's title 'king of Jerusalem' relatively secret, then its very inclusion in the register may indeed have been a scribal oversight.

The question remains, though: why did Honorius refuse to style Frederick 'king of Jerusalem' in the address clauses of letters sent to him, and, conversely, why did he continue to refer to John by this title, when he had already styled Frederick in this way on 5 January 1227? The answer lies in the pope's concern to maintain a reputation for justness in his public affairs, which was vital to the position of the papacy as an international mediator and court of appeal, and had been an important theme in the letters to Frederick discussed above. Honorius could not be seen to approve openly of the deposition, and therefore trod a careful, if slightly duplicitous, path between supporting Frederick and appeasing John. The pope also wished to maintain relations with John so as to employ him, as an experienced soldier, in the service of the Papal State.

The implications for the argument about Honorius' award of the title of 'king of Jerusalem' to Frederick in the *forma pacis* are threefold. First, it demonstrates that the pope did not exercise a complete prohibition on the use of the title, and that he *was* prepared to issue documents under his authority which included it, thus recognising Frederick as rightful king. This contributes the most persuasive piece of evidence to the notion that Honorius may have been a supporter of the coup, at the very least after the event, because it indicates that Honorius reinforced Frederick's position by advising others to address him as king of Jerusalem. Secondly, it provides a rare case study of an early thirteenth-century pope engaging in the chicanery of diplomacy, in this instance by appearing to champion the claim of one king of Jerusalem, whilst backing another. This was achieved through the careful manipulation of documents issued by the papal chancery, demonstrating the complexities of diplomacy, as well as the possibilities for exploitation by a

¹¹⁰ See, for instance, the common use of oral messages to supplement written documents regarding secret or sensitive political matters: Chaplais, *English Diplomatic Practice*, 78.

¹¹¹ Under Innocent III Gerald of Wales was permitted to examine the registers and, on another occasion, a thief gained access to the registers and cut out an entire leaf. See respectively: H.E. Butler, ed. and trans., *The Autobiography of Gerald of Wales*. New edn. (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2005), 192–4; Uta-Renate Blumenthal, 'Papal Registers in the Twelfth Century', in *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Medieval Canon Law, Cambridge 23–27 July 1984*, ed. Peter Linehan. Monumenta Iuris Canonici, Series C, Subsidia 8 (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1988), 146–7.

shrewd pope. Thirdly, it reveals the pope to have been a sharp and pragmatic politician who, on this occasion, acted in a way that was far less scrupulous than historians conventionally might have expected.

Conclusion

When considering the role of Honorius III in the deposition of John of Brienne in 1225, it pays dividends to return to the *Chronicle of Santa Maria de Ferraria*. In glossing over the episode to avoid portraying Frederick in a critical light, the chronicler presented Honorius prominently alongside the emperor in his compressed narrative of events, linking the pope's advice to marry Isabella with Frederick's assumption of the crown and the stripping of John's territories.¹¹² Whether or not the author intended to implicate Honorius in the coup, it is clear that, at least to this well-informed chronicler, the pope played a vital role in the events which led to the overthrow of the king of Jerusalem.

There is, however, no single piece of evidence which can be used to state, without a shadow of a doubt, that Honorius was actively involved in the overthrow of John. Yet, if one takes a long view of the putsch, the context of previous papal relations with the two kings, and Honorius' role after 1225, the pope's involvement was suspicious. He had seemingly never favoured John, who was far from a papal protégé, yet had a close working relationship with the very man who deposed him: Frederick. Honorius was not only instrumental in arranging the marriage in the first place, but was involved again, just before Frederick married Isabella, at the papal-imperial colloquium held at San Germano. There was an intention among the Frankish barons to replace John with Frederick. The noted curialist, Jacques de Vitry may also have been involved, supplying a potential link with Honorius. The pope made very little, if any, effort after November 1225 to restore John to his kingdom, but sought merely a reconciliation between the former king and Frederick for the sake of the Holy Land. Indeed, Honorius may even have assisted Frederick by pressuring John to relinquish to the emperor Philip Augustus' bequest for the Holy Land. The whole affair certainly turned out very well for the crusade, which was the defining theme of Honorius' pontificate, and the deposition of John both removed a hindrance from, and supplied an incentive for, the imperial expedition. The pope then manipulated the documents issued by his chancery to appear to champion John as the rightful king, whilst at the same time reinforcing Frederick's position by referring to him as the king of Jerusalem in the *forma pacis* document issued in January 1227. Papal influence can be discerned behind all the key events in John's deposition.

This evidence could be used to support a number of different interpretations of Honorius' role. One could contend that he actively connived with Frederick, and possibly the Syrian nobility as well, to remove John as king. To adopt such a view, however, would probably be to push the sources too far. The complete opposite would be to ignore John's relatively poor relations with Honorius, so as to argue that the pope was merely a pawn who would not resist Frederick. This would require one to discount the evidence of the pope's involvement and return to the out-dated and problematic stereotype of the older historiography. The most probable interpretation of events lies between the two extremes. Given the overall character of papal-imperial relations throughout Honorius' pontificate, in all probability it was Frederick who was

¹¹² *Ignoti monachi Cisterciensis*, 38: 'Ex consilio vero quidem pape Honorii atque curie Romane idem imperator accepit in matrimonium filiam dicti Iohannis regis Ierosolimitani sibi unicam cum eodem regno sibi pertinenti. Quod cum idem rex nollet ipsum in possessionem civitatum Acridi et Suri et aliarum civitatum ipsius regni et imperator vellet eas accipere, versa est amicitia in inimicitiam.'

the driving force behind the deposition. Contrary to the traditional view that Honorius was utterly opposed to the putsch, the pope appears to have lent it his support surreptitiously, sacrificing John's claim to the throne in order to advance the cause of the imperial crusade. All the while he attempted to avoid open warfare between the two kings by doing just enough to appease John, as witnessed in the letter sent to Frederick on 27 January 1227. Honorius subtly and successfully negotiated the aftermath of the deposition to profit from Frederick by acquiring a vigorous new king of Jerusalem, replacing in the process the unsatisfactory figure of John. That the pope carried this off in a skilled fashion is confirmed by the fact that he managed to secure John's appointment as a rector of the Papal State, which was John's consolation prize. Honorius has been greatly underestimated by scholarship: his potential to behave in a ruthlessly pragmatic manner is revealed here in his diplomacy between two kings of Jerusalem.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the Leverhulme Trust for the award of a Study Abroad Studentship (2013–15), during which this article was written. I wish to express my gratitude to Bernard Hamilton, Guy Perry and Danica Summerlin for kindly commenting on this article. I also offer my thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

Thomas W. Smith holds a PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London, where he wrote a thesis entitled 'Pope Honorius III and the Holy Crusades, 1216–1227: a Study in Responsive Papal Government'. Between 2012 and 2013 he held a Scouloudi Junior Research Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research, London. He is currently pursuing postdoctoral research into thirteenth-century papal petitions at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich, funded by a Leverhulme Trust Study Abroad Studentship (2013–15).