thereafter, Saladin’s descendants (the Ayyubids) held on to the lands he had conquered. Then the dynasty gave way (as we have often seen happen) to new military leaders. The chief difference this time was that these leaders were uniformly of Turkic slave and ex-slave origins—they were *mamluks*. The Mamluk Sultanate was exceptionally stable, holding on to Egypt and most of Syria until 1517.

The Undoing of Byzantium

In 1204 the leaders of the Fourth Crusade made a “detour” and conquered Constantinople instead. We shall later explore some of the reasons why they did so. But in the context of Byzantine history, the question is not why the Europeans attacked but rather why the Byzantines lost the fight.

Certainly the Byzantines themselves had no idea they were “in decline.” Prior to 1204, they had reconquered some of Anatolia. In the capital, the imperial court continued to function; its bureaucracy and machinery of taxation were still in place; and powerful men continued to vie to be emperors—as if there were still power and glory in the position. Yet much had changed from the heyday of the Comneni.