Trickery and Restoration in the *Alexiad*

by

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Introduction

On the *Alexiad* and its Author:

Written in the mid-twelfth century, the *Alexiad* offers an account of the reign of Alexios Komnenos I (r. 1081-1118) situated within a larger transformation of medieval Europe.\(^1\) Coming to power by military coup in 1081, Alexios adopted an empire in a moment of radical change and instability.\(^2\) Only a decade before, the empire faced a crisis of succession: in 1067, Romanos Diogenes assumed the throne, disrupting the Doukai dynasty. Wanting to secure his line of power, Romanos sought to gain a decisive military victory, and saw an opportunity in engaging the neighboring Turks at their major point of entry into Byzantine territory: an area north of Lake Van, commanded by the fortress of Manzikert.\(^3\) After two days of fighting, with the Byzantines gaining the upper hand, a rumor spread that Romanos had fallen in battle, causing a general retreat. Abandoned at the front lines, Romanos was surrounded and captured by the Turks.\(^4\) Though the loss at Manzikert had minimal military repercussions, it sparked a year of civil war within the empire. Leveraging the rumors of Romanos’ death, the Doukai, a powerful aristocratic family, reclaimed power and installed Michael Doukas as acting emperor. But upon his release from capture, Romanos quickly rallied his supporters and waged a losing war against the new imperial Dynasty. As the Byzantines occupied themselves with infighting, the Turks were

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\(^{1}\) Frankopan, “Introduction.”

\(^{2}\) Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” 611.

\(^{3}\) Angold, 608.

\(^{4}\) Kazhdan, “Mantzikert, Battle Of.”
able to exploit their victory at Manzikert and capture large swaths of eastern Byzantine territory.\textsuperscript{5}

In addition to shouldering the burden of decades of internal political instability and territorial decline in the east, Alexios’ reign also witnessed the unprecedented movement of the First Crusade.\textsuperscript{6} Within the first ten years of Alexios’ reign, the empire lost nearly all of Anatolia and Asia Minor to the Turks.\textsuperscript{7} According to Frankopan, in his work \textit{The First Crusade: A Call from the East}, Byzantine involvement proved an essential characteristic of the First Crusade. Alexios, lacking the resources needed for a successful reconquest of the East, turned to his western allies, namely count Robert I of Flanders and Pope Urban II, for additional troops.\textsuperscript{8} Through successful efforts to appeal to western values, Alexios was able to secure the necessary manpower; however, cooperation between Byzantium and the western armies proved short lasting.\textsuperscript{9} After Alexios secured the traditional western oaths of fealty with nearly all the Crusading leaders. Under this oath, the Crusaders were obligated to return all reconquered lands to Byzantine rule, and in return, Alexios was to offer his leadership and support in their military efforts, Byzantine and western forces worked together to take Nicaea, but the period of cooperation was short lasting.\textsuperscript{10} At a moment of low morale and a lack of supplies, the Byzantine commander Tatikios left the crusaders at Antioch.\textsuperscript{11} Without a clear Byzantine presence, the Norman military

\textsuperscript{5} Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” 609.
\textsuperscript{6} Frankopan, “Introduction.”
\textsuperscript{7} Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” 610.
\textsuperscript{8} Frankopan, \textit{The First Crusade}, 96–97.
\textsuperscript{9} Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” 623.
\textsuperscript{10} Frankopan, \textit{The First Crusade}, 134–36.
\textsuperscript{11} Frankopan, 158.
commander Bohemond secured his hold on Antioch while the other leaders
headed to take Jerusalem, disregarding the oaths they had originally sworn. In
light of these events, Frankopan assesses that The Crusade began with Alexios’
pleas to the west and terminated with a western rejection of Byzantine
leadership.\textsuperscript{12}

Princess and daughter to Alexios himself, Anna Komnene is lauded as the
first woman historian both in the Byzantine empire and the whole of western
Europe.\textsuperscript{13} Born in 1083, Anna was raised and educated in the imperial palace in
Constantinople.\textsuperscript{14} She lived through the reign of both her father and brother, and
did not begin the task of writing until the death of her husband, Nikephoros
Bryennios, a trusted member of Alexios’ circle and himself a proficient writer and
historian. With her husband’s history apparently left incomplete,\textsuperscript{15} covering the
period from 1057 to 1081, Anna tasked herself with composing the history of her
father.\textsuperscript{16} Completed in the years before her death in 1153, the majority of the
Alexiad was written after the accession of her nephew, Manuel I, to the throne.\textsuperscript{17}

By the end of his reign, Alexios had successfully revived the empire as an
effective financial and military power, and left behind an unchallenged line of
imperial succession. His eldest son, John II, secured the imperial title, and built up
his own political faction as a measure to prevent conspiracy against him. John II’s

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Frankopan, 206.
\item[13] Frankopan, “Introduction.”
\item[15] Neville, \textit{Heroes and Romans in Twelfth-Century Byzantium}.
\item[16] Frankopan, “Introduction.”
more information on the reign of Manuel I and the period in which Anna Komnene was writing,
see: Magdalino, \textit{The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180}.
\end{footnotes}
reign was defined by aggressive militarism, which continued his father’s mission
of territorial expansion. His death in 1143, caused by a hunting accident, cut short
what would have been the most ambitious attempt to expand and restore
Byzantium’s borders. At John’s death, Manuel I, the youngest of John II’s four
sons, was named successor to the throne after the unexpected death of his two
eldest brothers. With familial tensions rising—both Manuel’s remaining brother,
and his uncle coveted the throne—Manuel began his reign with immense pressure
to prove himself and emulate his father’s achievements. Unlike his father, Manuel
focused his efforts more on forging alliances than on gaining new territories.
Despite his successful diplomatic pursuits, the empire was disrupted by the
military and political crisis caused by the Second Crusade; the initial expedition
of Luis VII of France denied any chance for cooperation with the Byzantines, and
the later participation of Manuel’s German ally Conrad III only further
exacerbated the threats against the Byzantine state. It is under these conditions,
having watched both her brother and nephew carry the legacy of her father’s
reign, that Komnene wrote her history to preserve and frame the legacy of
Alexios.18

The Alexiad proves itself a successful text because it crosses the
boundaries of genre while building on the literature of its time. Scholars have
shown how this genre-blending yet classically informed work structures and
controls the narrative of Alexios’ life. The narrow focus on a singular figure
forces the text to straddle genres of history, biography, and possibly Byzantine

hagiography; the text’s engagement with multiple genres sets it apart from the literature of its time. At the same time, some scholars have emphasized the work’s engagement with Greek mythology and epic as indicative of the text’s placement within a larger Hellenic tradition. Other scholars, such as Ljubarskij and Markopoulos, have argued for the Alexiad as a successor to breakthroughs made in 10th century Byzantine literature, most notably by the historian Michael Psellus. By looking at the work’s narrative strategies, it becomes possible to track how Komnene crafted the story of her father. This thesis will build on the recent work of Penelope Buckley to trace out how the Alexiad communicates one specific but essential aspect of its portrait of Alexios by building on the classical Greek literary figure of the clever king, or comic hero, as exemplified by Homer’s Odysseus, and by Alexander the Great in the Greek Alexander Romance.

Penelope Buckley and the Task of Literary Restoration:

In The Alexiad of Anna Komnene: Artistic Strategy in the Making of a Myth (Cambridge, 2014), Buckley argues that the Alexiad, as a literary work, reframes and rehabilitates the memory of Alexios. Working chronologically through the text, Buckley examines how Komnene, “through accumulation and revision,” successfully memorializes Alexios as an imperial figure worthy of being remembered among the greatest emperors within the Byzantine tradition. Komnene frames Alexios’ reign as a project of restoration of empire and, through

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19 For more information, see: Jakov, “Why Is the Alexiad a Masterpiece of Byzantine Literature?”; Markopoulos, “From Narrative Historiography to Historical Biography. New Trends in Byzantine Historical Writing in the 10th–11th Centuries.”
20 Buckley, The Alexiad of Anna Komnene, 1.
this framing, compares Alexios both implicitly and explicitly to the greatest emperors of the Byzantine and Roman empires.21

Buckley demonstrates the link between the idealization of Alexios and the restoration of empire through three major lines of evidence. First, Buckley calls attention to the historical frame of the narrative in “reference to the great Byzantine defeat at Manzikert in 1071.”22 Consequently, Komnene tells of Alexios’ military efforts through the lens of both a territorial and symbolic restoration on empire. Though Alexios never fully regains the territories lost to the Turks in the decades preceding his reign, Komnene frames the narrative such that “it was always Alexios’ task to restore the territories lost at Manzikert, and all that those territories had come to represent.”23

As a second line of evidence, Buckley emphasizes Komnene’s attention to and employment of “Hellenic Christianity” as a testament to her father’s transformation of Byzantine culture.24 Within Byzantine society, Hellenism represented a devotion and connection to Greek civilization expressed by Byzantine scholars. Hellenism began to take on greater emphasis over the course of the Twelfth Century as the empire faced continuing conflict from both westerners and Turks.25 As Buckley writes, “The great value of his reign, as [Komnene] repeatedly attests, is just the recovery and reformation of the Hellenic Christian culture.”26 These repeated testimonies to which Buckley refers appear

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21 Buckley, 2.
22 Buckley, 2.
23 Buckley, 246.
24 Buckley, 39.
25 Talbot and Kazhdan, “Hellenism.”
26 Buckley, The Alexiad of Anna Komnene, 39.
both in the content of Komnene’s history and in her own blending of classical and Christian literary modes.

Lastly, Buckley compares Alexios’ characterization with other literary portrayals of the imperial ideal within the Byzantine cannon. Alexios’ revival of Christian piety with the help of his mother in Book Three, his perfection of military leadership in Book Six, and his victorious defense of Christian Orthodoxy without bloodshed in Books Ten and Thirteen all lend Buckley the evidence to claim Alexios’ fulfillment the Constantinian model of the ideal emperor. In mirroring Alexios’ character to that of the mythicized Constantine, Alexios more fully embodies the ideal emperor, in which the role of restorer is embedded.

Buckley grounds her framing of the program of the Alexiad through a close reading of its Prologue, which Buckley understands to be “a model for the whole.” Under Buckley’s careful eye, every method Komnene uses in mythicizing her father finds its origin within the opening pages as she begins to craft the narrative of her father’s life. In her study of the Prologue, Buckley moves between two main arguments. Her first argument revolves around the concept of “change through continuity.” This concept is an adaption of a principle argument of “change and continuity” set out by A. P. Kazhdan in Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. In his work, Kazhdan asserts that while Byzantine culture underwent notable change within

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27 Buckley, 250–54.  
28 Buckley, 37.  
29 Buckley, 1.  
30 Buckley, 289.
these two centuries, these changes did not represent a complete departure or break from cultural heritage of the empire.\textsuperscript{31} Borrowing this framework, Buckley examines Komnene’s narrative craft as it resides within or breaks from an existing literary and cultural cannon:\textsuperscript{32} on the one hand, Komnene uses the prologue to both name herself the inheritor of her husband’s incomplete history and show imprints of Psellos’ inspiration on her narrative style; on the other, Komnene revises and reworks the literary modes left behind by her intellectual predecessors. Her work both honors the Byzantine literary cannon while deviating from it, rendering Alexios both an exemplary and formative figure within the imperial line. Buckley’s second argument marks a parallel between the tasks of author and subject. For Buckley, the Prologue demonstrates how Komnene assumes “in shadow-form a task of completing Alexios’ empire: controlling it in parallel, disclosing its meanings and making it endure.”\textsuperscript{33} As Komnene writes of her father’s task of restoring empire, she in turn engages in the act of restoring her father’s legacy. The overarching theme of restoration is embedded both in the content of what Komnene writes and in the literary devices she uses to craft her writing.\textsuperscript{34}

Within the portrayal of Alexios as a restorer, there is a potentially troubling dynamic, as Alexios is often portrayed as something like a trickster. This thesis will address this potential counterargument to Buckley’s thesis by

\textsuperscript{31} Kazhdan and Wharton Epstein, \textit{Change in Byzantine Culture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries}, 231.
\textsuperscript{32} Buckley, \textit{The Alexiad of Anna Komnene}, 14.
\textsuperscript{33} Buckley, 41.
\textsuperscript{34} Buckley, 41–43.
walking through the key moments in which Alexios displays a preference for achieving victory by tricking, out maneuvering, and outwitting his opponents. Rather than showing Alexios to be un-imperial in these behaviors, this aspect of the narrative and of Alexios’ character further emphasizes Komnene’s argument that her father deserves to be memorialized among the greatest heroes of the Greek literary tradition. In order to successfully portray the emperor as a great diplomat and manipulator, Komnene carefully constructs her rhetoric in order to contrast Alexios the restorer with his opponents, who deploy tricks and ruses to further their own ambitions and create chaos.35

A Note on Terminology and Translation:

In order give ideas of “trickery,” “guile,” and the character of the “trickster” substantive meaning, this thesis will primarily rely on the language present in the Alexiad. When referring to the more deceptive strategies of Alexios and his opponents, Komnene most uses the terms “scheme,” “plan,” or occasionally, “ruse.” Interestingly, when it comes to describing characters, Komnene seems to differentiate Alexios from his enemies, at least in part, by using separate terms. The most enduring and formidable enemy in the text, the Norman Bohemond, is “cunning” and “deceiving;”36 the heretical group of Bogomils, led by Basil, that appear as the final enemy during Alexios’ reign, are “adept at feigning.”37 Alexios, on the other hand, is praised for his “guile” and

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35 As an introduction to trickery within the Alexiad see: L Albu, “Bohemond and the Rooster: Byzantines, Normans, and the Artful Ruse.”
36 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, The Alexiad, 297.
37 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 455.
“play-acting,”38 however, Komnene tends to demonstrate these traits of her father, rather than mention them outright. That being the case, Komnene never speaks of “trickery” or “trickster” characters; This thesis has chosen to engage with these two terms in order to concisely identify and interact with Alexios’ particular strategies and behaviors throughout the text.

In identifying these key terms, it is important to note that this thesis relies on the English translation of the original Greek by Peter Frankopan, whose work in turn is a revision of the translation completed by E.R.A. Sewter. As a consequence of working in translation, particular readings could be altered by an examination of the Greek. However, because the argument as a whole depends on thematic and structural concerns, and does not hinge on the importance of any singular word in the English, this thesis still stands as a worthwhile examination of the *Alexiad*, despite the limits of working in translation.

In order to smoothly draw in the terms “trickery” and “trickster,” this thesis will borrow from Nortwick’s definition of the trickster that he uses for his own literary analysis of Homer’s *Odyssey*. Nortwick first latches on to three essential characteristics to define the trickster. First, the trickster is a folkloric archetype and a ubiquitous figure across cultures. Second, the trickster is a marginal or excluded figure, who intrudes from the outside and breaches boundaries.39 From these two traits alone, it would seem obvious that Komnene’s characterization of Alexios does not fit the mold of the trickster. Komnene’s writing exists solidly within the world of the Byzantine literary tradition, and her

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38 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 10–14.
protagonist is rendered the center of her writing. Though Alexios does not fit the mold of the trickster, he does share one essential trait. According to Nortwick, the third essential character of the trickster is holding the power to question present realities and create new ones.40 Within this discussion of marginality and boundaries, Nortwick further defines the trickster as a transgressor; the trickster confuses and reassigns meanings, resulting in the expansion or creation of new boundaries and the questioning of old systems.41 Komnene seems to lend Alexios this particular ability, but never embeds her father fully within the trickster type.

With the intention to parse out the overlap between heroism and cunning within the famously wily Odysseus, Nortwick introduces another figure, the comic hero, who largely functions in contrast to the trickster. Because the comic narrative hinges on a return to order, it is the task of the comic hero to resolve disruption and disorder. Because of the emphasis placed on restoration, “the protagonist of a comic story is often deceptive, manipulating people and even events […] to ensure the proper outcome.”42 Just as we have already seen Buckley emphasize restoration within Komnene’s portrayal of Alexios, the comic hero is also ultimately framed as a restorer. Both comic hero and trickster share a tendency toward deception and manipulation, and both can get away with such morally questionable behaviors. However, these figures contrast each other on all other fronts. Where the trickster resides in folklore, the comic hero stands as a literary type; the trickster is often a supernatural or magical being, whereas the

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40 Van Nortwick, 92.
41 Van Nortwick, 84–85.
42 Van Nortwick, 86.
hero is typically human, and thereby mortal. Most crucially, the comic hero’s aim, as dictated by his narrative arch, is to restore the status quo; the trickster’s purpose is always to subvert and disrupt.43

Applying these terms to the Alexiad, Alexios can be understood as the comic hero, who often turns to deceptive or manipulative tactics in order to recuperate the empire from its shrunken and disgraced state. From Alexios’ first engagement with his task of restoration until his final act as emperor, the Alexiad can be considered a comic narrative in so far as it portrays the Byzantine empire returning to a state of political, religious, and intellectual preeminence, an ideal of empire that Komnene treats as “the regular order of things.”44 The trickery that Alexios engages him does not make him a true trickster, but rather is a necessary tool to bring about his acts of restoration.

In varying degrees, Komnene casts Alexios’ opponents as tricksters; as enemies that threaten Alexios’ task of restoration, or worse, seek to further plummet the empire into disarray, engaging in their own forms of deceptions and manipulations to do so. This thesis will focus on three such characters: Roussel, Bohemond, and Basil the Bogomil. Though these three men enact their trickery through different methods and with different results, they share an essential trait intrinsic to the trickster type: all three men are encroaching outsiders to Byzantine society. Roussel and Bohemond, both referred to as Kelts, are outsiders by birth. Basil, in his adherence to heretical doctrine, is excluded from the religious cannon.

43 Van Nortwick, 86.
44 Van Nortwick, 86.
of Orthodoxy. Each of these three men, “by intruding where he doesn’t belong, he can disturb the world’s shape,”\textsuperscript{45} and threaten the empire.

But of these three men, it is Bohemond, Alexios’ primary enemy for the majority of the narrative, who most fully embodies the trickster archetype. Roussel and Basil, as Alexios’ first and final opponents respectively, serve to frame Alexios’ narrative as that of the comic hero. Bohemond, on the other hand, remains a relatively constant presence from the beginning of the Norman Invasions, (which Komnene recounts in Book Four) until his defeat and signing of the treaty of Devol in Book Thirteen. As Alexios works to restore the empire from within, Bohemond is constantly crossing boundaries, moving in and out of the empire, and with each motion challenges the existence of the Byzantine empire.\textsuperscript{46} Through the conflict between Alexios and Bohemond, enacted through deception, persuasion, and tricks of all kinds, Komnene continually sets up her father to be the comic hero who, out-tricking the trickster, can restore the proper order within the world of the narrative.

\textbf{On the Narrative Arc:}

In order to prove that the development of Alexios’ trickery runs parallel with his general trajectory in the text, this thesis works to identify where Komnene discusses her father’s more deceptive or manipulative behaviors, and uncover how she crafts her father as a comic hero within these moments. This thesis will work through a series of vignettes, which will engage an analysis of Komnene’s literary technique. The chosen scenes that comprise the vignettes represent a

\textsuperscript{45} Van Nortwick, 88.

\textsuperscript{46} Van Nortwick, 88.
relatively cohesive survey of the tricks recorded within the *Alexiad*, enacted by both Alexios and his enemies alike. In mirroring Buckley’s method of Analysis, these vignettes will follow the chronological order of the text, as to respect the cumulative nature of the work and to track Alexios’ development as both a restorative figure and a trickster.47

Chapter 1 shows how, from the opening of her history, the tactics Komnene uses to establish Alexios’ restorative task rely on her crafting the character Alexios as a comic hero. Although the narrative begins with Alexios performing an act of deception, this act restores order and preserves lives. Komnene frames the deceptions practiced by Alexios’ opponents in direct contrast to Alexios’ restorative deeds. His opponents, motivated by personal ambition, only produce tricks that result in chaos and death. This chapter analyzes this contrast by explaining the narrative techniques used to create the contrasting types. Komnene’s use of the language of stagecraft and performance in part explains how Alexios can use deception and trickery while still maintaining the qualities of a hero and savior.

The next four chapters pursue Alexios’ narrative development as a comic hero through a series of contrasts between Alexios and the Norman invader Bohemond. These contrasts are best exemplified in the later Books of the *Alexiad*, with anecdotes drawn from Book Eleven and Book Thirteen. At the beginning of this arc, Komnene begins with the established character of Alexios as comic hero, but his successes are comparable to those that Bohemond achieves as the trickster.

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type. By the end of the arc it becomes clear how Alexios is superior to Bohemond; by concluding Book Thirteen with the Treaty of Devol, which outlines Bohemond’s surrender, Komnene proves her father’s superiority and inherent heroism in his ability to outmaneuver a great trickster and restore peace to the empire.

Chapter 2 begins by showing how Alexios’ relationship with the arriving crusaders grounds his characterization as a comic hero. Alexios establishes relationships through oaths of fealty in order to reconquer territories in Asia Minor, specifically the city of Nicaea. When Alexios realizes that, despite the oaths they swore, the crusaders are motivated by ambition rather than restoration, Alexios is forced to turn to more deceptive strategies in order to use these tricksters to fulfill his goal of restoring order. The emperor leverages the true loyalties he has with his own men as means of navigating around his less secure relationships with the crusaders. Alexios’ strategies allow him to “trick” the crusaders into fulfilling their oaths despite their true intention to break them and take the city of Nicaea for themselves. As this chapter recounts Alexios’ methods of taking Nicaea, it demonstrates how the character of Alexios has evolved to embody an imperial Byzantine version of the comic hero.

Chapter 3 turns to the second siege of Book Eleven, in which the crusading forces set their eyes on Antioch. Here, the focus is on the Alexiad’s archetype of the trickster character, Bohemond. The ways in which Bohemond moves to conquer the city of Antioch provides a perfect contrast with how Alexios had just
reconquered Nicaea. The contrast between the characters of Bohemond and Alexios distinguishes the character type of trickster from that of the comic hero.

Chapter 4 addresses the final episode of Book Eleven, and begins to establish the trickster type’s inferiority to the comic hero as Komnene continues to emphasize the contrast between Alexios and Bohemond. Bohemond has managed to fulfill his personal ambitions and conquers Antioch. However, because he achieves this through disruption and chaos, he cannot rest in a newly established order, but rather is compelled to escape his own conquest. To realize his escape, Bohemond devises a dramatic retreat from Antioch. In perhaps the most memorable story in the *Alexiad*, Bohemond fakes his own death to escape the impending Byzantine offensive. At the end of this anecdote, Bohemond emerges from hiding only to proclaim an empty boast of his renewed ambitions to destroy the Byzantine Empire. Komnene’s particular care in constructing the figure of Bohemond in direct contrast to that of her father sets up the ultimate victory of Alexios.48

Chapter 5 describes the extended resolution of the conflict between the trickster character of Bohemond, and the clever and yet honest comic hero character of Alexios. By walking through the extended battle of Dyrrakhion and resulting treaty of Devol, which take up the narrative of Book Thirteen, this chapter examines the final confrontation between Alexios and Bohemond. The trickster Bohemond engages in a series of futile ploys, each of which are anticipated and countered by Alexios’ men. Alexios finally affirms his mastery

48 For an analysis of Bohemond’s escape and trickery with an eye toward Norman myth and tradition, see: Albu, “Bohemond and the Rooster: Byzantines, Normans, and the Artful Ruse.”
over Bohemond, not by defeating him on the battlefield, but by forcing him into diplomatic negotiations to renew and affirm his original oath of fealty, which he had since broken through his repeated attempts at conquest.

Chapter 6 aims to explore the completion of Alexios’ narrative arc as emperor by analyzing Alexios’ confrontation of Basil the Bogomil, and how Alexios then works to save the lives and souls of his subjects from Basil’s heresy. This chapter argues that Alexios’ final act as emperor is the final comic resolution to the arc of Komnene’s characterization of her father. Here Komnene’s characterization of Alexios as restorer ascends from the earthly to the heavenly as Alexios becomes not only the restorer of empire and the preserver of the lives of his subjects, but also the restorer of providence and the savior of his subjects’ souls.
Chapter 1: Hero or Trickster?

To begin her history proper, Anna Komnene portrays a declining empire in the shadows of the Byzantine loss at Manzikert in 1071. By all accounts this military defeat on the Eastern edge of the empire was an epoch-defining event. From the mid-eleventh century, the Seljuk Turks had advanced through the east with surprising speed. By the reign of Constantine IX (r.1042-1055) the Seljuks has gained possession over the Near East up to the boarders of the Byzantine empire. Under the command of Sultan Alp Arslan, the Seljuks invaded Byzantine controlled Armenia in 1065, then forced their way into Asia Minor in 1067. The Emperor Romanos Diogenes, upon assuming the throne in 1068, quickly took up the struggle against the Seljuq advancement. Emperor and Sultan came face to face at Manzikert, a fortress on the eastern frontiers of the Byzantine empire. Within two days of battle, Diogenes was surrounded and captured.

With Romanos Diogenes imprisoned, his political rivals in Constantinople installed Michael Doukas as the new emperor in 1071. This meant that upon Diogenes’ release, a civil war between rival political factions ensued. During the resulting turmoil within Byzantium, Alp Arslan quietly conquered nearly the whole of Anatolia.

Komnene begins the history of her father with Alexios’ military career in the context of this crisis. Unconcerned with the adolescent Alexios’ early exploits, Komnene quickly jumps from his military career under the reign of Romanos

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49 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, The Alexiad, 10.
50 Ostrogorsky, History of the Byzantine State, 343.
51 Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” 609.
Diogenes IV to that of Michael Doukas. Under Emperor Doukas, Alexios achieves the rank of stratopedarkhes,\textsuperscript{52} then is appointed to the position of megas domestikos.\textsuperscript{53} His nearing ascension to the throne becomes a natural, and necessary, motion as the imperial leadership stutters. While Alexios achieves military success, Anna maintains a sense of continued disarray within the imperial leadership.\textsuperscript{54} As a result, Alexios’ early career successes are therefore framed by an implicit comparison.

Komnene uses this introduction of Alexios into the action to set up the theme of Alexios as the restorer of Empire. Taking the life of her father in full view, she assesses, “the Emperor Alexios, my father, even before he seized the throne had been a great service to the Roman Empire.”\textsuperscript{55} This establishes a “comic” narrative, one in which the Byzantine “world will eventually be restored.”\textsuperscript{56} His military career and his subsequent reign are “an act of rescue.”\textsuperscript{57} Komnene sets in motion the process of restoration, through the military rise of Alexios.

In order to establish Alexios within the type of comic hero, Komnene puts Alexios in conflict with trickster enemies, the first of many that Alexios will confront throughout his reign. The environment of imperial decline opens opportunities for new enemies. Roussel, a Norman mercenary under Byzantine service, seizes on the confusion produced in the aftermath of Manzikert and takes

\textsuperscript{52} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 11.
\textsuperscript{53} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 16.
\textsuperscript{54} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 10.
\textsuperscript{55} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 9.
\textsuperscript{56} Van Nortwick, “The Ward of Hermes: Odysseus as Trickster,” 86.
\textsuperscript{57} Buckley, \textit{The Alexiad of Anna Komnene}, 46.
control of Amaseia and its surrounding area. Further aggravating the situation in the east, “the barbarian Toutakh,” crosses the Byzantine frontier from eastern Anatolia, bringing with him a powerful army. These two enemies, but Roussel especially, show themselves to be ambition-driven tricksters. On the most basic level, the external enemies of empire are tricksters because they “cross boundaries,” both physically by entering Byzantine territory, and symbolically by transgressing against Byzantine sovereignty. As Roussel continues his conquest, Komnene writes of an empire in crisis:

Sometimes [Roussel] attacked in person, defeating his adversaries like a hurricane; at other times, when he sought aid from the Turks, it became so impossible to withstand his onslaughts that he even took prisoner some of the greatest general and routed their armies.

Despite the temporal distance between the author and the events of her history, Komnene evokes a feeling of immediate despair and anxiety. Roussel, a seemingly unstoppable force, subverts Komnene’s Byzantine Empire.

The feeling of subversion is heightened when Komnene clarifies that the source of subversion is within the empire’s ranks, naming Roussel “master of these veterans,” the Byzantine forces. With the massive expanse of the Byzantine empire being chipped away, and the most esteemed members of the Byzantine military bested by a foreign rebel, Roussel challenges the longstanding realities of the Byzantine empire.

Komnene counters the arrival of Roussel with the advent of Alexios:

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59 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, The Alexiad, 11.
61 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, The Alexiad, 10.
Alexios’ promotion initiates his task of restoration; he is to combat the destruction and disorder generated by Roussel, and as a result restore order and Byzantine rule on the eastern border.

In order to beat Roussel, and initiate in the task of restoration, Alexios turns to a particular strategy, defined by what Komnene calls his “guile.” As the protagonist of Komnene’s narrative, Alexios has access to guile but does not suffer from the moral implications; his guile is as admirable and straight as his experience. Conversely, in having Alexios turn to guile, Komnene can cast him as a particular type of hero from the outset. Like Homer’s Odysseus, who engages in cunning in order to return to Ithaca and restore his reign, or like the mythic tradition surrounding Alexander the Great, which credits Alexander for both founding a great empire and outpacing his enemies by trickery, Alexios is initiated into the role of comic hero. The task of restoration and the method of trickery are paired: the latter is the means to reach the former. As a result, guile forms the foundation of Alexios’ behaviors and strategies as he combats not only Roussel, but all incursions into the preeminence of the Byzantine empire.

Guile is also what Komnene also uses guile to distinguish and elevate Alexios from his peers. Alexios is both the only “worthy opponent,” but not because his military strategies or fighting abilities are superior, but because he is the only commander who leverages guile to attack his adversary. Because this

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62 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 10.
trait is absent from the earlier descriptions of the other generals, Komnene furthers the link between Alexios’ character and his success. Alexios is different because he is tricky, and in successfully leveraging the use of trickery, he is able to meet Roussel on the battlefield as an equal.

The battle between Roussel and Alexios evolves from a conflict of arms into a conflict of wit. In both settings, Alexios acts in response to Roussel; a fighter in both offensive and defensive position, Alexios’ aim is not just to reconquer the territories stolen by Roussel, but to preserve what the Empire still has in its possession. Under this strategy, “true to heroic traditions, [Alexios] not only surpasses his opponents but appropriates some of their vertù.”63 Though Roussel descends like a whirlwind upon the Byzantines, “Alexios was quick to see the right course of action and even quicker to take it,”64 and responds in comparable speed. One by one, Alexios begins to take down one stronghold after another, outpacing Roussel and mounting pressure upon him. It is then Roussel, under threat of military defeat, who initiates the change in strategy. Nearing the end of his resources, and desiring to save himself, Roussel successfully forms an alliance with Toutakh.

Komnene paints the subsequent movements of Roussel and Alexios as an exchange of tricks. Roussel’s search for an alliance with Toutakh is identified as a “scheme,” which is in turn “thwarted by [Alexios], who by cordial offers, backed persistently by arguments, gifts, and every device and stratagem, won the

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barbarian [Toutakh] over.”65 Alexios’ diplomacy, in its effort to turn an enemy to an ally, is marked as a type of trick. As a rhetorician, Alexios panders to Toutakh and shifts his opponent’s frame of reference, writing to him:

[Roussel’s] whole plan of campaign is carefully thought out: for the moment he is pursuing me with you help; later when the time is propitious, he will […] alter his tactics and make war on you.66

Alexios manipulates Toutakh’s perception of his newfound ally. Under Alexios’ pen, Roussel is not a man to be trusted, but a cunning and selfish opportunist. Within this accusation, Alexios plays the role of advisor, acting “sympathetically into Persia’s own territorial ambitions.”67 In bringing Roussel into suspicion, he his own path toward an alliance with Toutakh preemptively corrects the potential damage wrought by an alliance of two power-hungry outsiders. With Toutakh hooked, Alexios continues in the act:

My advice to you is this: when he returns to you, seize him, for which we will pay you well, and send him to us in chains.68

Alexios disguises byzantine imperatives as an ideal economic opportunity for Toutakh. When Toutakh sends soldiers to capture Roussel and deliver him to the Byzantines, two perceptions of reality are at play: On the one hand, Toutakh is motivated to capture Roussel by the promises of monetary gain; on the other, Toutakh, in reality, is working under Alexios’ orders, on behalf of the empire. In other words, Toutakh is tricked into serving the Byzantine empire and aiding the process of its restoration.

65 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 11.
66 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 11.
67 Buckley, The Alexiad of Anna Komnene, 49.
68 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, The Alexiad, 11.
Despite his capture, Roussel still poses a problem for the Byzantines. Alexios is forced to hold Roussel prisoner in Amaseia, Roussel’s previous center of operations and a hub for his supporters.69 Though Roussel posed a threat to the Byzantine state, the local people of Amaseia welcomed his presence because he offered some protection from Turkish raids.70 To complicate the issue further, Alexios lacks the resources to compensate Toutakh as promised, and receiving no aid from the emperor Michael, is forced to turn toward the people of Amaseia for funds.71 Alexios’ first attempt to collect contributions goes poorly, and results in mass uproar. Roussel’s supporters agitate the crowd further and demand for Roussel’s release.

Realizing his misstep, Alexios seeks to manipulate the crowd in a way similar to how he previously manipulated Toutakh. Compelling the crowd to silence, he addresses them again:

Men of Amaseia[,] I am amazed that you have so completely misunderstood the intrigues of these men who deceive you, buying their own safety at the cost of your blood and continually plotting your absolute ruin. What will you get out of Roussel’s revolt?72

Once again, he accuses Roussel of trickery, blaming him for deceiving the townspeople of Amaseia. In claiming to reveal Roussel’s true intentions, Alexios shifts the perspective of the townsfolk. Alexios asserts that Roussel does not offer protection, but rather endangers the safety of Amaseia. In positioning Roussel as an enemy and threat to the town, Alexios begins to persuade the townspeople to

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69 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 12.
71 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, The Alexiad, 12.
72 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 13.
join the Byzantine cause, and to convince them that they can expect true protection in return.

With the goal to both ending the threat of Roussel’s revolt and gaining assistance in compensating Toutakh, Alexios devises a plan to pretend to blind Roussel, a trick which Komnene praises for its ingenuity and for its success in mitigating unnecessary violence. To understand the rationale of Alexios’ new plan, Komnene offers access into her father’s thoughts, writing that Alexios was afraid that agitators would harangue [the townspeople] during the night, attack him, lead Roussel from his prison and set him free. Resistance against such overwhelming numbers would be impossible. However, he devised a plan worthy of Palamedes himself.\textsuperscript{73}

With Roussel presumed to be blinded, he would be incapable of leading a revolt, and his supporters would have no choice but to give up the cause. Recalling her authorial task of mythicizing her father, Komnene evokes the Greek mythic tradition in comparing her father to Palamedes, a clever character who was able to get the better of the famed Homeric trickster Odysseus.\textsuperscript{74} Alexios’ trickery is born from his desire to overcome the obstacles that threaten the life of the empire.

In depicting the feigned blinding of Roussel, Komnene grafts the trickery imbued in Alexios’ rhetoric onto his actions. Komnene achieves this by emphasizing the importance of appearances as she describes the mechanisms of the trick:

\begin{quote}
The man was laid flat on the ground, the executioner brought the branding iron near to his face, and Roussel howled and groaned; he was like a roaring lion. To all appearances he was being blinded. But in fact the apparent victim had been ordered to shout and bawl; the executioner who seemed to be gouging out his eyes was told to glare horribly at the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{73} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 13.
\textsuperscript{74} Frankopan, “Notes,” 482.
prostrate Roussel and act like a raving madman – in other words, to simulate the punishment.\textsuperscript{75}

Alexios trick is successful in its deception because it communicates one reality while enacting another. To the onlooker, Roussel is painfully blinded at the hands of Alexios, incapacitated as a leader by his inflicted injury. Although Roussel remains unharmed, Alexios has stripped him of his ability to be a leader by deceiving the people of Amaseia into thinking that Roussel has been violently blinded.

Alexios embodies the comic hero by altering reality through the vehicle of appearances;\textsuperscript{76} because Roussel appears blinded, he is considered no longer fit to lead, and his revolt is no longer a possible reality. With their original protector gone, and the threat of Turkish raids looming as Toutakh is still to be compensated, Roussel’s sympathizers now turn to Alexios and the Byzantine empire for protection and support. Maintaining the act and keeping Roussel bandaged and in imprisoned, Alexios is then able to reincorporate all the towns Roussel had previously captured, their leader now seemingly and actually incapacitated.\textsuperscript{77}

However, upon reuniting with relatives on the march back to Constantinople, Alexios is met with harsh criticism. Alexios and his soldiers take a brief respite in his grandfather’s town, and are received by a figure of some importance and a cousin of Alexios, one Dokeianos. Upon seeing Roussel, his head still wrapped in bandages as if blind, Dokeianos “sighed deeply, shed tears

\textsuperscript{75} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 13–14.
\textsuperscript{77} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 14.
and accused my father of cruelty. He even went so far as to rebuke him personally for having deprived a man so noble and a true hero of his sight. Dokeianos’ outcry implicates Alexios in betraying a certain standard of behavior. In Dokeianos’ eyes Alexios’ supposed cruelty denies any room for the morality that distinguishes the Byzantines from their violent barbarian enemies.

Presented with by a threat against his character, Alexios is compelled, albeit in secret, to reveal his trick to his cousin, thereby ending the deception. Though keeping up the ruse to the public, Alexios brings Dokeianos to a small room to unwrap Roussel’s bandages. When Roussel’s unblinded eyes are revealed, Dokeianos responds in shock and amazement going so far as to put his hands on Roussel’s eyes to affirm that Roussel is indeed uninjured. In pretending to blind Roussel, Alexios “play-acts” that he is willing to indulge in cruel and violent behavior. But just as Roussel, in reality, retains his sight, Alexios too retains his humanity and dignity by avoiding an act of violence even as, to achieve the victory for the empire, he needed the residents of Amaseia to believe he had enacted the violent disfiguration of his enemy. As a result, Dokeianos praises Alexios for “his humanity and artifice,” both characteristics shining through in equal measure. Alexios establishes himself firmly in the role of comic hero through his ability to use artifice and deception for the good of the empire.

78 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 14.
79 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 14.
80 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 14.
Chapter 2: Deception and Trust in the Siege of Nicaea

In the opening of Book One, Komnene establishes Alexios within the type of the comic hero; before he has seized the throne, Alexios is tasked with reversing the decline of the Byzantine Empire, and demonstrates the guile and trickery needed to initiate such a reversal. Over the course of the first ten books, Komnene details the first fifteen years of Alexios’ reign, using specific military campaigns as a means to shape him as “the empire’s strategist and general.”

Books Four to Six focus primarily on the Norman war, which lasted between 1081-1085, highlighting Alexios’ efforts to contain new enemies from the west. Books Seven and Eight turn attention to Alexios’ war against the Scyths, which happened from 1087 to 1091. With each campaign, Komnene depicts an empire “expanding toward its previous greatness,” with Alexios leading the way.

According to Buckley, Book Ten marks the end of Alexios’ trials as “the earthly Roman emperor” and begins his trials as “the one true vicar of Christ.” In his former role, Alexios has successfully leveraged his success as a military leader to restore stability to the government. Having firmly established her father as a restorer through military means, Komnene pulls him away from battle. Instead, she centers Alexios in the narrative by emphasizing his role as chief strategist. In the theater of war, Alexios shifts from actor to director, controlling the movements on stage. Komnene continues to ground this history in military conquest, while also invoking a theological emphasis by marking Alexios’

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81 Buckley, The Alexiad of Anna Komnene, 107.
82 Buckley, 107.
83 Buckley, 193.
leadership as Christian in its style and values. Buckley argues that Komnene casts Alexios’ character in more theological terms in order to demonstrate his ability to withstand, and prevail over, the Crusade, as it threatens Byzantine governance and Byzantine hegemony over Christianity in the east.84

The First Crusade transforms the latter half of Alexios’ reign. As Frankopan argues in The First Crusade: The Call from the East, the First Crusade originated through Alexios’ pleas to the west, and was subsequently shaped by his decisive role in the crusading effort.85 By 1095, Alexios pacified the Balkans and restored a sense of stability within the Byzantine government.86 However, within the same period, Alexios faced a “near total collapse of Asia minor,” as Turkish leaders took control of Nicaea, Nikomedia, and key islands in the Aegean during the early 1090s.87 In attempting to face the encroaching Turkish forces, it soon became clear that the empire lacked the manpower needed to affect a reconquest.88 Frankopan then argues that Alexios’ awareness and engagement with western values not only secured the aid that the empire needed,89 but also helped maintain a sense of partnership between east and west during the first year of the crusading effort.90

Never using the term “Crusade” herself, Komnene depicts the influx of foreign force as a sort of invasion by western powers, using Norman attempts to invade Byzantine territory nearly a decade earlier to contextualize this influx. For

84 Buckley, 191–93.
85 Frankopan, The First Crusade.
86 Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” 621.
87 Frankopan, The First Crusade, 57–63.
88 Angold, “Belle Époque or Crisis? (1025–1118),” 621; Frankopan, The First Crusade, 86.
89 Frankopan, The First Crusade, 89.
90 Frankopan, 138.
Komnene, the Crusade is the escalation of the tensions building between the Byzantines and the Latins, the Normans, and the Kelts that constitute the west. Specifically, Komnene casts the western military advancement as an extension of Bohemond’s continued investment in seizing Byzantine territory for himself. Bohemond had demonstrated himself as a formidable threat to the empire in Book Five, but loses to Alexios the battle of Larissa in Book Six. Now, in Book Ten, as western princes and their forces begin to congregate outside the walls of Constantinople, both Komnene and her father eye these foreigners with suspicion.

Count Godfrey refuses to move his encampment upon his arrival to the imperial city, causing tensions to begin to rise and the western presence to take on an increasingly threatening character. Komnene takes Godfrey to be another trickster, lying and making excuses to hold his position in order to cover how, “in fact, of course, he was waiting for Bohemond.” Komnene, from her position of hindsight, interprets all the crusaders’ actions a form of trickery, writing, “to all appearances they were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in reality they planned to dethrone the emperor and seize the capital.” Tension mounts as Godfrey and his troops begin to plunder the areas just outside Constantinople and skirmish against Byzantine envoys near the city walls, causing the people of Byzantium to respond in panic. The episode helps confirm Komnene’s assertions of the westerners’ real intentions. As the historian, Komnene forms a new connection between action

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92 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 285.
93 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 285.
and intention to reveal that the western counts were attempting to deceive Alexios.

Faced by the threat of deceptive crusaders, Alexios adopts a dual role as both comic hero and trickster. The crusaders’ perceived intentions to deceive Alexios and undercut the Byzantine empire compels him to respond in kind, for Alexios must counteract the disorder caused by raucous outsiders. Yet, at the same time, he maintains the noble cause of the comic hero, converting his reactive tricks into an active effort of restoration. At first, in order to protect his imperial sovereignty and neutralize the threat of oncoming western forces, Alexios requires Godfrey and the other crusading leaders to take an oath of fealty.

By this oath, the western counts swear to hand off any conquered lands previously controlled by the empire over to Byzantine leadership. In return, Alexios promises to provide protection and aid to the western forces on their journey eastward. According to Frankopan’s analysis, the oaths were able to achieve two distinct goals: first, “the long-term aim of ensuring that all future gains made by the western knights across Asia Minor would revert” to Byzantine control; second, the short term aim of securing “[Alexios’] own position in Constantinople as the crusaders gathered in Byzantium.”

Alexios and the western counts are set to pursue a joint venture into Asia Minor through the terms of the oaths, however, despite a contract of allegiance, there remains a lack of trust. As the crusading forces leave Constantinople for

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94 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 289.
95 Frankopan, The First Crusade, 134.
Nicaea, Alexios decides to keep distance from the crusading expedition, wary of their large numbers.\textsuperscript{96} Establishing himself in the nearby Pelekanos, Alexios could obtain information about the Kelts and their progress and at the same time could learn about Turkish sorties from the town, as well as about the condition of the inhabitants inside Nicaea.\textsuperscript{97}

From a safe distance, Alexios keeps a careful eye on the crusaders due to his lack of trust to let them siege against Nicaea without supervision. Within this precautionary vein, Alexios also begins to construct a secret plan to take Nicaea ahead of the westerners. In telling his confidant and co-conspirator Boutoumites of his intentions to capture Nicaea, Alexios commands Boutoumites to win over the barbarians in Nicaea by all kinds of guarantees and the promise of a complete amnesty, but also holding over them the prospect of this or that retribution – even massacre – if the Kelts took the town.\textsuperscript{98}

The threat of western force becomes an additional bargaining chip for Alexios to use while negotiating with Nicaea. At the same time, by capturing Nicaea using guile, Alexios installs a safeguard to ensure that the crusaders are held to the terms of their oaths. As a result, Alexios’ plan to secretly capture the city ahead of the crusaders allows him to circumnavigate the oaths while still keeping them intact. Thus, regardless of who takes the city in the end, Alexios guarantees a recuperation of Nicaea. In his mission to ensure the capture of Nicaea, Alexios relies on his successful tactics; through negotiation, he persuades and manipulates. The aim becomes to maintain a working relationship with the

\textsuperscript{96} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 296.
\textsuperscript{97} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 296.
\textsuperscript{98} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 296.
crusaders while minimizing violence against the town of Nicaea, which Alexios aims to reincorporate into the empire.

With the help of trustworthy commanders, Alexios aims to persuade the people of Nicaea to surrender peacefully in the midst of the Crusader’s assault. Although Alexios doubts the crusaders’ ability to keep their oaths, his absolute trust in the loyalty of his men allows him to perfectly coordinate his subordinates and carry out his diplomacy-driven reconquest. When Alexios first conceives of his plan to take Nicaea, he keeps his idea a secret with the exception of telling Boutoumites, trusting in his “unswerving loyalty and […] his competence.” As Boutoumites’ entreaties to the people of Nicaea on behalf of the emperor become increasingly successful, Alexios calls on another trustworthy subordinate, Tatikios, for additional aid.

Komnene pivots between multiple centers of action as a means of highlighting the trickery central to Alexios’ secret diplomatic negotiations. As Alexios’ men move to enact his orders, the battle for Nicaea is divided into two fronts; Boutoumites confronts Nicaea on the lake, while Tatikios joins the crusaders on land. While the Byzantine commander Boutoumites presses the townspeople to submit to the emperor, coaxing them with promises of gifts and favors, the crusaders carry out a land-side assault on the city walls. At first, the townspeople turn toward their sultan for aid, but in a violent and ferocious skirmish the crusaders successfully fight off the sultan’s reinforcements.

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99 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 297.
100 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 296.
101 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 297.
102 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 298.
Watching the results of the battle from afar, Alexios decides to employ a two-pronged approach. Maintaining appearances with the crusaders, Alexios sends his commander Tatikios, accompanied by a small force, to join the crusaders in the assault on the walls. But rather than serve as a substantive support, Tatikios’ presence serves as evidence of Alexios honoring his end of the oaths with the crusaders by providing some level of military assistance. At the same time, Alexios sends Boutoumites to approach the city walls by sea, loading Boutoumites’ ships with extra standards and drums to give the appearance of a much larger fleet. The combined pressure of additional attacks on the land-side walls alongside Boutoumites approach by sea causes the people of Nicaea to relent to the emperor’s requests and begin peace talks with Boutoumites. In order to keep the Byzantine success a secret, Boutoumites, under Alexios’ orders, sends a coded letter to Tatikios, written as if Boutoumites had taken the town by force. Within this letter, Tatikios is made aware of the plot’s success and is commanded to redirect the crusading forces such that they are still sieging Nicaea, but in a way that mitigates the damage and prevents the crusader’s entrance into the city.

The following day, as the crusading forces continue to make war against the city, Boutoumites and his men claim Nicaea for the emperor inside the city’s walls.

As Boutoumites approaches by sea represent, “play acting” becomes the centerpiece of the emperor’s strategy. The emperor gives Boutoumites’ fleet an excess of standards, trumpets and drums “in order that they might seem more

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103 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 301.
104 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 300.
105 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 301.
106 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 302.
numerous than they really were.”

Though the emperor’s intentions remain peaceful and diplomatic, the fleet performs an act of an aggression that further pushes Nicaea to surrender. More importantly, Boutoumites’ advance on the lake remains completely hidden from the crusaders, who are busy attacking the city’s walls on land; the geographical separation between the land-side walls and the lake allow for a physical barrier that conceals Alexios’ dealings with the townspeople of Nicaea and leaves the crusaders unaware. This barrier then acts as a curtain between the two sides, as if staging a play; Boutoumites is the lead actor under the direction of Alexios, enacting a dramatic performance of diplomacy.

Alexios’ reliance on Tatikios furthers a sense of deception; not only is Alexios secretly taking Nicaea from the crusaders, but he is also maintaining the reality that he is still in alliance with them by hiding the components of his strategy that would suggest otherwise. Although Alexios distrusts the crusaders and their ability to keep their oaths, by providing aid, Alexios still upholds, in appearance, his end of the agreement. Tatikios and his small detachment further the trick in three essential ways. First, Tatikios’ presence is evidence that Alexios is honoring his oath to the crusaders. The emperor is sending aid and protection to the crusaders, as promised, in the form of armed reinforcements. Once Tatikios arrives, his “men fired their arrows in great volleys while the Kelts made breaches in the walls,” establishing a sense of cooperation among the two armies. Second, Tatikios’ siege serves as an additional scare tactic to compel the city to surrender to Boutoumites. The increased pressure on the mainland, combined with

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107 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 300.
108 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 301.
the appearance of a massive naval force, frightens and disheartens the city’s defenders (301). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Tatikios works to further distract the crusaders, leaving no possibility for the crusaders to discover the deceptive plot. Badly shaken by the increased attacks on land and the oncoming fleet by sea, they surrender to the emperor and accept negotiations with Boutoumites. Upon his immediate success, Boutoumites writes to Tatikios:

‘The quarry is now in our hands. Preparations must be made for an assault on the walls. The Kelts must be given that task too, but leave nothing to them except the wall-fighting around the ramparts.’

It is now Tatikios task to engage the crusaders in continued siege, while simultaneously preventing them from entering the town. He keeps the westerners out of the way and occupied, distracted by their continued siege efforts, allowing Boutoumites to engage in negotiations. Komnene makes this aspect of Tatikios role explicit, writing “This [letter] was in fact a trick to make the Kelts believe that the town had been captured by Boutoumites through combat.”

Boutoumites’ message tricks the crusaders into believing that the emperor is assisting them in their violent assault against Nicaea; Tatikios’ response to the letter maintains such an illusion, while enabling his fellow commander to secure a peaceful surrender. The faultless loyalty and cooperation of Alexios’ men speak to the strength of Alexios’ leadership. His men trust him, and in return for their trust, Alexios is able to enact his task of restoration through them. The restoration of the Byzantine empire is in part a communal effort in which all, under the

109 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 301.
110 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 301.
restorative guidance of Alexios, help achieve renewal for the sake of the whole of the empire.

The impact of Tatikios’ simple following of instructions highlights an essential mechanism that allows Alexios’ trick to be successful—the proven loyalty of the emperor’s men. In order to work around the untrustworthy crusaders, Alexios’ plan to capture Nicaea hinges on working closely with the men that he trusts in order to work around the untrustworthy crusaders. Once Alexios decides to engage in diplomacy with the people of Nicaea without alerting the crusaders, he divulges his plan to the Byzantine general Boutoumites, “his sole confidant” who had previously proven his “unswerving loyalty” to Alexios.\textsuperscript{111} The loyalty of Tatikios and Boutoumites allow Alexios to create such a complex deception.

While Komnene shifts her attention between the walls and the lake, she continues to evoke the influence of the emperor, who, though away from the action, is able to unite the two fronts and enable Byzantine presence in multiple places at once. At first, Komnene seems to use a defensive tone when explaining Alexios’ absence from battle, writing, “The emperor would have liked to accompany the expedition […], but abandoned the project after carefully weighing the arguments for and against,” citing the crusaders’ overwhelming numbers, and “how untrustworthy the Latins were” as reasons to keep away.\textsuperscript{112}

In reconstructing Alexios’ thoughts, Komnene seems to recall the disaster at Manzikert; the then emperor Diogenes was captured in battle, resulting in a

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\item Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 296.
\item Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 300.
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decisive Byzantine defeat. Alexios has learnt from his predecessor’s mistakes and, given his tenuous relationship with the crusaders, keeps his distance. At the same time, Alexios’ absence from the immediate battle allows Komnene to showcase the extent of her father’s cunning and strategic thinking. As the Crusader’s siege against the walls of Nicaea and fight back Turkish reinforcements, Alexios watches from a distance, gaining access to a wider perspective of the battle.

Despite his physical absence, his influence remains ubiquitous, as Tatikios and Boutoumites work as extensions of the emperor’s will. Tatikios, bringing the emperor’s orders to the crusading forces and taking control of the land assault, enacts Alexios’ military leadership. Boutoumites, in order to open negotiations with Nicaea, “showed them the chrysobull entrusted to him by the emperor, in which they were not only granted an amnesty, but also a liberal gift of money and honours.” 113 The chrysobull, an imperial order, evokes the presence of the emperor on paper. In the coded message sent between Boutoumites and Tatikios, Komnene makes apparent Alexios’ guiding hand, writing, “the drama of betrayal carefully planned by the emperor was to be concealed, for it was his wish that the negotiations conducted by Boutoumites should not be divulged to the Kelts.” 114 Alexios holds full control over the texts that bind his strategy together and allow him to manipulate realities as a comic hero; he provides the structure by which his commanders can enact a successful and peaceful reconquest.

Though Alexios’ men play a vital role in the capture of Nicaea, when they attempt to enact a trick of their own, they fall short, lacking Alexios’ same

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113 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 301.
114 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 301–2.
mastery over guile. Once Boutoumites gains control of Nicaea on behalf of the emperor, he is faced with the threat of the satraps, the Turkish governors, who were still inside the city and could potentially overwhelm and attack Boutoumites and his forces. In a seeming attempt to emulate Alexios, Boutoumites aims “to reduce the number of satraps by a ruse, in order to have them at his mercy, and to avoid something terrible happening to him.”\textsuperscript{115} Though Boutoumites is similar to his superior in his preference for ruse, his motivations are ill-placed. Boutoumites, prioritizing his personal motivations, thinks more of his own position than of serving the empire as a whole. In contrast, through her discussion of Alexios’ intentions and drive, Komnene consistently attributes his actions to his desire to restore empire. Even in prefacing his taking of Nicaea, Komnene discusses her father’s drive to take Nicaea for the sake of the empire.\textsuperscript{116} Alexios stands as unique in his selfless ambition toward restoration, not toward destruction or personal ambition. Though other tricksters exist in Komnene’s narrative, it is only Alexios who can play the role of comic hero. With this difference of motivation, Komnene subtly hints at shortcomings of Boutoumites and his fellow soldiers as they attempt to drive out the Turkish satraps. Taking control of the town gate, Boutoumites plans to send off the satraps in groups of ten, and with the help of soldiers Monastras and Rodomeros, usher the satraps quickly to the emperor on the promise of money and titles. If all three played their parts correctly, the satraps would never regroup, and would not have the possibility of plotting against the Byzantines. However, the plan goes awry when Monoastras and

\textsuperscript{115} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 302.
\textsuperscript{116} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 296.
Rodomeros fail to do their part, and end up being held hostage, realizing Boutoumites’ fears even before the ruse was set in motion. Komnene foreshadows Boutoumites’ failure as she preemptively criticizes his scheme, writing:

This was in fact a simple prediction, an intuitive proof which could only be put down to the man’s [Boutoumites] long experience, for as long as the new arrivals were quickly sent on to the emperor, they were secure and could pose no danger whatsoever, but were the vigilance to be relaxed in any way, they would find themselves in peril from the barbarians whom they kept back.\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 302.}

Komnene’s analysis finds Boutoumites’ plan to lack the clever ingenuity demonstrated in her father’s strategies. Boutoumites’ strategic thinking, lacking the level of guile solely possessed by Alexios, is attributed only to his experience as a soldier. As clever as Komnene first makes the trick to be, she quickly strips away the trickster-like element of Boutoumites’ strategy, diminishing him in his poor attempt to emulate Alexios. Moreover, Komnene also warns of the failures latent within such a strategy. In addition to alluding to Monastras and Rodomeros’ unfortunate capture, Komnene also points to the importance of loyalty and trust in crafting more complex tricks. Without the uttermost confidence that Monastras and Rodomeros can fulfill their role as chaperones and loyally follow Boutoumites’ command, Boutoumites consequently opens himself and his men up to undue risk at the hands of their enemies.

When such a dangerous possibility becomes a reality, and Monastras and Rodomeros become prisoners of the men they were escorting. Luckily, however, the two men are luckily able to free themselves by pleading and persuading, and ultimately lead the satraps to the emperor. However, the arrival of the satraps
comes as a surprise to Alexios, who is able to receive his guests warmly and shower them with their promised gifts, but “inwardly he was very angry with Rodomeros and Monastras.”¹¹⁸ Even caught by surprise, Alexios is ever the trickster. He is able to bring out the truth of the ruse, and knows how to play along. However, the arrival of these unexpected guests shows a further breach of trust between Alexios and his men. Alexios is able to reconcile with his men, but only because he was able to enact a ruse in response to the circumstances, pretending to be honored by his soldier’s guests, when in reality he was furious with the misconduct of his men. When the Turks leave on good graces, Rodomeros and Monastras in turn make amends for breaching the emperor’s trust, and express incredible shame for their own actions.¹¹⁹ But the irresponsibility of these two men under Boutoumites’ leadership demonstrates the crucial role that loyalty plays in Alexios’ increasingly complex tricks.

¹¹⁸ Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 303.
¹¹⁹ Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 303.
Chapter 3: A Trickster Takes Antioch

While Komnene has depicted Alexios as an apt trickster, he does not hold a monopoly over trickery within the *Alexiad*. With the arrival of the crusaders in Book Ten, another trickster character, Bohemond, the son of Robert Guiscard, enters the fray. This is not the first time these two men have come into conflict; Bohemond is first introduced in Book Five, temporarily replacing his father as the leader of the Norman campaign against Byzantium. When Alexios assumes the throne, his first major challenge as emperor is to defeat Bohemond’s father, the notoriously cunning Robert Guiscard, and prevent Norman expansion into Byzantine territory. In Book Five, Alexios begins to combat Robert’s advances with the help of a newfound alliance with Henry IV. In response, Robert returns to Lombardy for reinforcements, and charges his son Bohemond with leading the military campaign. The majority of Book Five covers the series of battles between Alexios and Bohemond; Komnene describes these battles as a prolonged exchange of tricks. In their first two battles at Kastoria, Bohemond seems to have the upper hand, seeing through Alexios’ attempt at deceptive military tactics and avoiding falling prey to them. However, as Bohemond moves to take the town of Larissa, Alexios is finally able to “Defeat the Latins by guile,” adjusting his tactics to correct for past mistakes. The Normans charge in a place where Alexios is not and are subsequently caught in ambush. Alexios is ultimately able to drive Bohemond out of the empire through his tactful use of rhetoric; he riles up

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120 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 137–39.  
121 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 141.  
122 Buckley, *The Alexiad of Anna Komnene*, 123.
the western counts supporting Bohemond to demand their back pay. Bohemond, unable to meet their demands, flees to Avlona. With Robert’s untimely death in Book Six, the First Norman War effectively comes to a close, forcing Bohemond to retreat. The First Crusade offers Bohemond an opportunity to return to Byzantium and continue his father’s legacy of self-aggrandizement at the expense of the empire.

Following Alexios’ victory at Nicaea, Komnene quickly outlines the formalities between the crusaders and Alexios as they set their sights on Antioch. Komnene condenses the journey between the two cities within a single sentence, writing, “the Latins with the Roman army reached Antioch by what is called the Quick March, ignoring the lands to either side of this.” As Komnene establishes the siege of Antioch, she borrows from her own description of the previous siege at Nicaea. Similar to Nicaea, once the crusading forces arrive at Antioch, they settle into a prolonged siege of the city’s walls. Additionally, just as the people of Nicaea, in their desperate state, called upon their sultan for help, “the Turks, who were extremely anxious about the difficult position in which they found themselves, sent a message to the sultan of Khorasan, imploring him to supply enough men.” Komnene’s mention of the defenders’ difficult position within Antioch echoes her description of the serious conditions plaguing the people of Nicaea. By juxtaposing the two scenes within the narrative, and by diminishing the geographical distance between Nicaea and Antioch, Komnene links the two

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124 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 306.
125 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 297.
sieges together, encouraging a comparison between them. Komnene uses Bohemond’s return and his siege on Antioch as an opportunity to compare Alexios and one of his most formidable enemies; a trickster with ill intentions for the empire, Bohemond becomes a foil to the character of Alexios. By creating similar conditions in both places, Komnene allows a sharp contrast between Alexios and Bohemond by juxtaposing their actions. As a result, the discrepancies between the two siege outcomes lie within the differences between these men’s leadership and cunning.

In describing the conception of Bohemond’s plot to take Antioch for himself, Komnene diminishes Bohemond’s role within his own plan. While guarding a section of the city wall, Bohemond stumbles across an opportunity to secretly take Antioch with the help of a treacherous Armenian defender. As luck would seem to have it, “this man often used to lean over the parapet and so Bohemond took the opportunity to tempt him with many promises and convinced him to agree to hand over the city.” Bohemond has no plan of action until, by fortune of circumstance, he is presented with an opportunity to pursue his ambition. His lack of planning contrasts sharply with Alexios’ meticulous planning leading into the capture of Nicaea. Hence, from the inception of Bohemond’s plan, Komnene implies a sharp contrast between Bohemond and her father.

Bohemond’s efforts to persuade a single defender echo Boutoumites’ courting of the people of Nicaea under the direction of the emperor. However,

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126 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 306.
where Boutoumites acts under clear orders, Bohemond acts out of impulse. The rhetorical move of persuasion by making promises is partially present in Alexios’ directions for Boutoumites, who is “instructed to win over the barbarians in Nicaea by all kinds of guarantees and the promise of a complete amnesty.” But without a premeditated plan, once Bohemond convinces the defender to cooperate, he is not the one to strategize. Rather:

the Armenian said to him: ‘Whenever you like to give me the sign from the outside, I will at once hand this tower over to you. Only make sure that you and all the men under you are ready, with ladders at the ready. […] all the men should be in armour, so that as soon as the Turks see you on the tower and hear you shouting your war cries, they panic and flee.’

It is Bohemond’s newfound ally, not Bohemond, who plots the successful taking of Antioch. Komnene gives credit to the nameless traitor, who dictates the trick to Bohemond and provides instructions. Where Alexios proves his guile through his ability to come up with such schemes like the taking of Antioch, Bohemond fails to demonstrate the same level of planning. It is the unnamed traitor that suggests the use of coded communication and the establishment of a more threatening appearance, which echo similar tactics used by Alexios in the siege of Nicaea. Bohemond’s behavior better coincides with Boutoumites’ at Nicaea, the byzantine commander who is praised for his ability to follow orders, but is unable to develop a successful trick himself. Although Komnene allows Bohemond to prove his cunning in persuading this unnamed man to defect, she diminishes his ownership over the scheme through his reliance on another to develop his strategy.

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127 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 296.
128 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 306.
Consequently, Komnene brands Bohemond a trickster because of the subversive threat he holds against the empire; impulsive, ambitions, and causing chaos from the margins, Bohemond embodies the folkloric transgressive trickster.\textsuperscript{129} By constructing Bohemond’s character in this way, Komnene then shows, by contrast, how her father is also a trickster, but of another type. Whereas Bohemond proves a trickster by threatening existing realities; Alexios, perpetually motivated by his restorative task, engages the methods of the trickster, carefully manipulating his opponents’ sense of reality and altering appearances, so that he can maintain and preserve the glory of the Byzantine empire.\textsuperscript{130}

Because the siege of Antioch follows shortly after Alexios’ taking of Nicaea, the complicated relationship between Alexios and the crusaders, formalized by the oaths of fealty, remains at play. Although Alexios expressed doubts of the longevity of the oath during the siege of Nicaea, due to his careful attention to appearance, the oaths remain in effect. On the surface, Alexios provided the aid and protection he promised by sending Tatikios and Boutoumites as reinforcements, which allowed the empire, in return, to take control of the besieged city of Nicaea. Further, Byzantine forces, led by Tatikios, travelled with the crusaders of Antioch, serving as a reminder to the crusaders of Alexios’ continued protection and respect of the oath.\textsuperscript{131}

Under the continued existence of the oaths, Komnene imbues a sense of betrayal within Bohemond’s plans to take Antioch for himself. Although Alexios

\textsuperscript{129} Van Nortwick, “The Ward of Hermes: Odysseus as Trickster,” 84.
\textsuperscript{130} Van Nortwick, 96.
\textsuperscript{131} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 307.
circumnavigated the conditions of the oaths and deceived the crusaders in order to secure byzantine authority over Antioch, he was only able to accomplish this while preserving the conditions of the oaths, mainly by offering his armed forces as aid. Bohemond, on the other hand, similarly seeks a way to circumnavigate the oath without overtly breaking it, but for different a reason. Because Bohemond is “unwilling to hand over Antioch to Tatikios, as he was bound to do if he kept his oaths to the emperor, and coveting the city for himself, he devised an evil scheme for removing Tatikios against his will.”132 If Bohemond were to take control of Antioch instead of a byzantine official, Bohemond would be violating the conditions of his oath to Alexios. By deceptively removing all byzantine presence, Bohemond feels more secure in claiming ownership over Antioch, as there would be no way to cede his conquest to the Byzantines if they have no representative present. Unlike Alexios, who worked within the confines of the oath to capture Nicaea, Bohemond works to absolve himself of accountability to the oath. However, Bohemond’s painstaking planning around the oaths of fealty demonstrates Alexios’ overreaching influence. Although Alexios never joins the crusaders, Bohemond’s oath renders Alexios immediately present; to act against the oath would be to make an enemy of the emperor. Bohemond’s scheme becomes a delayed reaction to Alexios’ quick thinking when the crusaders first entered the Byzantine Empire.

Bohemond shares Alexios’ preference for rhetoric, yet in his successful attempt to remove Tatikios from Antioch, Bohemond engages in a threatening and

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violent discourse that stands in marked contrast with Alexios’ more compassionate and generous methods of persuasion. Upon learning of the imminent arrival of the sultan’s forces, Bohemond uses this knowledge to fabricate a rumor to sufficiently threaten Tatikios and compel him to flee. In other words, the rumor becomes the means by which Bohemond can disregard the oath. At first, Bohemond approaches Tatikios with supposed confidential information, saying, “I wish to reveal a secret to you, which has to do with your personal safety.” Feigning concern for Tatikios, Bohemond makes himself appear a trustworthy ally; his apparent desire to divulge potentially life-saving information creates the implication that Bohemond is protecting his ally and the Byzantine forces, hiding the reality that he intends to betray them. However, what Bohemond shares with Tatikios is completely fabricated: “a report has reached the ears of the counts, […] revealing that the sultan has sent these men against us at the emperor’s bidding. The counts believe the story is true and they are plotting to kill you.” The use of rumor masks Bohemond’s lies. As Bohemond demonstrates, it is irrelevant whether the rumor holds any truth; rather, it is the threat that the counts believe that the emperor holds ill will against them, and are plotting aggression against his commander in retaliation, that compels Tatikios to abandon Antioch. Divulging the rumor allows Bohemond to distance himself from the other counts; he is warning Tatikios rather than joining in the plot against him. As a result, Bohemond fabricates his continued loyalty to the oath. In contrast, Alexios continued to enforce the parameters of the oath during his

133 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 307.
efforts to take Nicaea. After alerting Tatikios, Bohemond concludes, “I have now done my duty in warning you,” as if to reference the obligations of his oath.

Bohemond uses similar rhetorical tactics to address his fellow crusaders as he did with Tatikios, seeming to mark his allies as enemies. Whereas Alexios’ confidence in the loyalty of his men allowed him to conduct an elaborate trick at Nicaea, Bohemond abuses his allies’ trust in order to forward his own ends. Once again Bohemond relies on speechmaking and deceptive rhetoric to craft a false sense of trust and mutual interest between himself and his fellow counts.

Addressing them, he encourages a change in strategy, feigning distress about the lack of progress made by military siege. Bohemond does not stray far from the truth at first; he recognizes the length of the siege and the potential cost of human life in continuing an unsuccessful assault with dwindling provisions. Then, evoking a sense of camaraderie, Bohemond plays at letting his fellow crusaders in on a tactful scheme while he continues to hide his own plans from them.

Bohemond offers the counts his advice, suggesting, “what the turmoil of war has not produced is often gladly given through negotiation, and friendly diplomatic manoeuvres many a time have set up finer trophies. Let us not waste time in vain, but rather hurry to come up with a cunning and bold scheme to save ourselves” (307). Having previously described the crusaders current position in unattractive terms, Bohemond compares and glorifies the rewards of diplomatic cunning rather than military strength. Moreover, in referencing the collective “us,” Bohemond feigns a sense of unity and cooperation to disguise his selfish and

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individualistic plans. In accordance with the trickster type, Bohemond manipulates his fellow crusader’s perceptions of reality.

The invitation to outwit the crusader’s enemies becomes a tactic for Bohemond to outwit his own allies. Bohemond’s self-centeredness motivates him to make enemies out of his own allies, seeing them as rivals on his path to conquer Antioch. In devising a scheme for the crusaders, Bohemond suggests, “each of us should try hard to win over the barbarian watching his particular section. And if you approve, let a prize be awarded to the first man who succeeds in this – the governorship of the city, say, until the arrival of the emperor’s nominee, who will take over from us.”137 Bohemond’s proposal is the exact scheme that he has been keeping secret from the other counts; he creates a competition that he has already won. At the same time, he recalls the oaths to the emperor within setting up the competition by casting the governorship of Antioch as a temporary position. As a result, Bohemond reduces the chances of the other counts and reminds them of their loyalties, despite the fact that he plans to secretly go against the oaths.

In contrast to the methodical portrayal of Alexios’ victory at Nicaea, Komnene describes the result of Bohemond’s deceptive persuasions as rushed and sudden. Komnene imbues her description of Bohemond’s seizure of Antioch with a sense of hurry. Once the counts agree to Bohemond’s proposed scheme, “Bohemond immediately went off to the tower; the Armenian, according to his agreement, opened the gates. Bohemond leapt at once to the top of the tower as

fast as he could, followed by his comrades.\textsuperscript{138} Despite the careful layering of deceptions, Bohemond scrambles during the critical moment. Through a series of rushed actions, from Bohemond “immediately” initiating his plan to climbing the tower “as fast as he could,” Komnene highlights Bohemond’s anxiety and the uncertainty surrounding his scheme. As a result, Bohemond appears to partially undermine his efforts to outwit his western and Byzantine allies in doubting the certainty of his chance at victory, which he had worked so hard to secure.

This sense of uncertainty stands in stark contrast to the assuredness Komnene renders her father; in dealing with both Alexios’ tricks at Amaseia and Nicaea, Komnene cultivates a strong sense of confidence and belief in her father's capability to secure victory and outwit his enemies. Bohemond’s rush to siege Antioch seems to indicate a continued uncertainty in his own ability to secure a hold over the city, partially undermining his efforts to outwit his western and Byzantine allies into giving him an assured victory. This sense of uncertainty is furthered by Bohemond’s status as a lone actor. As Bohemond sets his scheme in motion, “Besiegers and besieged alike saw him standing there on the battlements.”\textsuperscript{139} Bohemond’s enemies and allies are grouped together as onlookers, watching Bohemond take the city by himself. Bohemond’s relationships with his fellow crusaders sharply contrasts with Alexios’ relationship with Boutoumites and Tatikios. In Nicaea, Alexios trusts in his men’s unswerving loyalty, and is able to use them to help further the goals of the empire.

\textsuperscript{138} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 308.
\textsuperscript{139} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 308.
By contrast, In making rivals of his fellow crusaders, Bohemond isolates himself for the sake of his own self-interest.

In Bohemond’s sudden success, a sense of shock overtakes the narrative as “an extraordinary sight could then be seen: the Turks, panic-stricken, without more ado fled,”\textsuperscript{140} in accord with the Armenian defender’s original plan. Stunning and chaotic, Bohemond throws the Turks into disarray as the rest watch; the trickster, crossing the boundaries, brings disorder. With the retreat of the Turkish forces, the collective action of war resumes, as “the Kelts outside follow in the steps of Bohemond”\textsuperscript{141} and enter the city.

But despite Bohemond’s previous speech about the benefits of peaceful negotiation, his scheme ultimately ends in violence as his nephew, “Tancred, with a strong force of Kelts, lost no time in pursuing the runaways, killing and wounding many of them.”\textsuperscript{142} The violent pursuit of the runaways displays a cruelty of character within Bohemond and his men. This promulgation of violence contrasts sharply with the impact of Alexios’ typical strategies. At Nicaea, for example, the defenders of the city view Alexios’ diplomatic outreach as a means to put an early end to the bloodshed and save the lives of the townspeople. Alexios’ order for Tatikios to redirect crusading efforts as he secures the surrender of the city effectively mitigates all threats of violence.

Komnene questions the stability of Bohemond’s leadership as his initial victory is compromised by the arrival of the sultan’s forces. As Turkish

\textsuperscript{140} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 308.
\textsuperscript{141} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 308.
\textsuperscript{142} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 308.
reinforcements begin to set up camp at the base of Antioch’s walls, the crusaders find themselves trapped between two enemies: the oncoming army outside the city and the remaining Turkish fighters within. The initial success of entering Antioch becomes a dire military situation, yet Bohemond single-mindedly persists in his goal, “being a shrewd man and wishing to secure for himself overlordship of Antioch.” Komnene emphasizes Bohemond’s self-centered attitude through her descriptions of his motivations as a kind of tyrannical fantasy. Bohemond, putting forward another scheme, proposes that the counts divide up their forces into two groups, one for each enemy. Taking advantage of his authority over the counts, and their previous deference to him, Bohemond suggests, “my task will be to fight the defenders of the citadel, if, that is, you agree.” Bohemond secures a more favorable position in holding authority over Antioch by putting himself in charge of the inner group of fighters. At the same time, he seeks approval from the counts to maintain appearances; his mission to claim Antioch becomes increasingly independent from his relationship with the crusaders, despite their mutual efforts to take the city. This break in the relationship contrasts sharply with the cohesion between Alexios and his men in Nicaea, established through Alexios’ efforts to coordinate and unite his men’s movements at both land and sea fronts. As the scene closes, and Komnene describes the crusaders’ efforts to maintain their position within Antioch, she notes that the other counts, in their vigilance over the walls, are “making sure no barbarians from the outside should climb up by ladders and so capture the city, that no one from the inside should

143 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 308.
144 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 308.
furtively make his way on to the walls and then, after parley with the enemy, arrange to betray it.”¹⁴⁵ The other counts are attempting to prevent the same scheme that Bohemond has just successfully executed. In capitalizing on such an opportunity, Bohemond leaves himself and the counts vulnerable to being similarly deceived. Just as Bohemond and Alexios enact different characteristics of the same trickster type, the result of each of their strategies also shows a sharp contrast. Here, Bohemond’s trickery breeds further opportunities for chaos. In contrast, Alexios’ wit breeds loyalty and order, as his men at Nicaea successfully coordinate and control the city of Nicaea.

¹⁴⁵ Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 309.
Chapter 4: Contrasting Character Types

Bohemond’s seizure of Antioch both proves his capabilities as a trickster and forces him into a position of greater instability. Although Bohemond threatens the Byzantine empire through his deceitful behavior and military conquest, he is also weakened by his insecure grip over Antioch and his diminishing army. As Bohemond becomes increasingly desperate, he formulates and carries out his most impressive deceit of faking his own death, demonstrating a level of cunning that rivals Alexios’, but causes only further chaos. Komnene, in detailing the craftsmanship behind Bohemond’s falsified death and funerary procession, constructs Bohemond as a formidable trickster and threat against the Byzantine empire while simultaneously undercutting and invalidating him.

Although Bohemond shows himself to be both a capable trickster and a military threat, as the fighting continues, the Byzantine forces begin to corner Bohemond, demonstrating Alexios’ superior military command. With the seizure of Antioch, Bohemond effectively breaks his oath of fealty to Alexios, proving himself a threat to the stability of the Byzantine Empire. Bohemond seeks to amass further conquests in the wake of his success in Antioch, and sends his nephew Tancred to occupy the nearby Laodikeia while awaiting for his own reinforcements; in turn, Alexios sends Boutoumites to prevent further efforts of territorial expansion, and tasks two other commanders to fend off the oncoming western reinforcements and attack Laodikeia by both land and sea. The force of

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146 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 321.
147 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 327.
the Byzantine siege in Laodikeia destabilizes Bohemond; his provisions dwindle, and he loses trust in the men directly under his command.

Bohemond’s decision to fake his own death is a consequence of his increasingly desperate position. Doubtful of the loyalty of his own men, Bohemond completely changes the leadership of the siege efforts in Laodikeia, then flees to Antioch amidst the heavy fighting. However, Antioch proves to be less of a haven; with no means of defense, and the city open to attack on both sides, Bohemond remains vulnerable to Byzantine advances.\textsuperscript{148} Such a destabilization of his military campaign causes Bohemond, who “shuddered at the emperor’s threats,”\textsuperscript{149} immense distress. The emperor, in his use of deceptions, has continued to promote peace and diplomacy, now engaging in a more straightforward military strategy proves himself capable of violent force. Yet, in battling Bohemond on multiple fronts, at different strongholds and by both land and sea, Alexios maintains a level of cunning that corners Bohemond further. The recognition of the power of the emperor, resulting in his own vulnerability, forces Bohemond into action, responding through deceit with “a plan, while not very elegant, was amazingly crafty.”\textsuperscript{150} Lacking the resources needed for a military response, Bohemond relies on his own cunning in a last resort.

With his self-interest at the forefront, Bohemond aims to use deception to save himself and gather reinforcements. Placing governorship of Antioch in the hands of Tancred, Bohemond begins spreading rumors of his own death, despite

\textsuperscript{148} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 328–29.
\textsuperscript{149} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 329.
\textsuperscript{150} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 329.
still being alive. Just as Alexios has shown his mastery over writing, as demonstrated by his successful entreaties to Toutakh as a young general, and later by the acceptance of his written promises, and ultimately his chrysobull, by the people of Nicaea, Roussel proves master over word-of-mouth communications. Though both rumor and letter are speech acts in some form, the ‘text’ that Bohemond chooses to specialize in is inherently open to misinterpretation, rewriting, and falsehood. With the spread of these rumors, Bohemond then crafts a funeral procession for himself; he has a coffin specially prepared with hidden breathing holes, and has himself laid inside and transported by sea as if he were a corpse. At each port, Bohemond’s men “tore out their hair and paraded their mourning”\(^{151}\) in a display of grief their supposedly deceased leader. In creating such a public spectacle, it is as if these men are actors performing to an audience as they travel. As a final precaution, Bohemond keeps a dead rooster by his side within the coffin with him, emanating the smell of decay. The combination of visual and olfactory deceptions, assisted by the theatrics of his crewmen, create the appearance of Bohemond’s early demise.\(^{152}\)

In detailing Bohemond’s escape from Antioch to Corfu, Komnene balances an admiration for cunning with a revulsion for what she considers a particularly “barbarian” mode of character. Komnene recognizes that Bohemond’s plan, “while not very elegant, was amazing crafty” and gives careful attention to each element. As soon as the scheme begins to set in motion, Bohemond “very much still alive, […] convinced the world that he had passed

\(^{151}\) Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 329.
\(^{152}\) Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 329.
away. Faster than the beating of a bird’s wings the story was fanned in all directions.”

Komnene quickens the pace of the narrative, and with it widens the scope. Bohemond’s trick, at first self-serving, creates a sudden and universal impact; Byzantium’s most pertinent threat is making an escape. Even as Komnene works through the preparation of the bireme, the coffin, the itinerary for travel, she preoccupies herself with the awareness that “inside the coffin, Bohemond, stretched out at full length, was a corpse in terms of physical pose only,” a constant precaution against being deceived by Bohemond’s deception. The sense of theater is heightened; Bohemond is performing a new role, albeit a false one.

Additionally, within the context of the First Crusade, Komnene assigns Bohemond’s actions a Christian meaning; the contrast between Alexios and Bohemond takes on increased significance in the battle over control of the true Christian narrative. As Buckley points out in her work, “In Komnene’s Christian culture […] Bohemond’s ‘rising’ must convey a Christian reference.” However, because Alexios has been built up throughout the text as a Christ-like figure, according to Buckley’s reading, Bohemond here plays the role of the “Antichrist.” Through his fake death and his return to life, Bohemond is “play-acting” a mockery of Christ’s entombment and resurrection.

However, although “Bohemond upstages Alexios” in his performance, “he is a ham and Alexios the classical performer.” Bohemond’s attempt at

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153 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 329.
154 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 329.
155 Buckley, The Alexiad of Anna Komnene, 227.
156 Buckley, 228.
157 Buckley, 226.
deception is a lower caliber. Komnene makes a point of this, even in the uneasy fixation on Bohemond’s falsified death, by belittling Bohemond and his men for engaging in “the same dirges, the same tomfoolery” at every port.\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 329.} Whatever cleverness was previously awarded to Bohemond in planning his faked death is now stripped away by the foolish behavior of his conspirators. Komnene then dwells on the most unsettling aspect of Bohemond’s trick, his making a bedfellow out of a dead and decaying rooster. Such a bizarre and visceral measure serves to further the illusion such that “those who had been deceived by the outward show thought the offensive odour emanated from Bohemond’s body, but Bohemond himself derived more pleasure than anyone from his imaginary misfortune.”\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 329.}

Bohemond seems to engage in a perverse self-satisfaction as conceptual artifice of the trick becomes debased by the actual methods. Komnene allows disgust and derision to seep through a generally passive historical narration as she renders Bohemond as morally base yet self-satisfied.

Komnene fixates on Bohemond’s moral baseness to undercut the cunning he has displayed. As she slips briefly into first-person narration, Komnene embeds her mixed reactions of admiration and disgust within a standard of behavior which Bohemond fails to adhere. Bohemond’s departure from expected behaviors and his embrace of the taboo both accentuate his role as the marginalized or outsider trickster.\footnote{Van Nortwick, “The Ward of Hermes: Odysseus as Trickster,” 85.} But rather than his transgressive behaviors succeeding in disruption, Komnene, in control of her narrative, renders
Bohemond even more of an outsider, preserving a sense of Byzantine values in the process. Komnene extends a sense of shock as she leaves Bohemond and his men to travel port to port, writing:

for my part I wonder how on earth he endured such a siege on his nasal faculties and still continued to live while being carried along with his dead companion. But that taught me how hard it is to check all barbarians once they have set their hearts on something: there is nothing, however objectionable, which they will not bear when they have made up their minds once and for all to undergo self-inflicted suffering.161

The model that Komnene presents for “barbarian,” or western, behavior contrasts sharply with the image of Alexios presented by her narrative thus far. Bohemond becomes a hyperbolic model of the self-centered and morally base behaviors that Komnene marks as foreign to both her father and the Byzantine empire in its ideal form. Moreover, Komnene recognizes the threat that Bohemond poses in his intensely single-minded mission to combat the Byzantine empire for his own gain, yet is highly critical of such a method. Bohemond imposes violence and suffering on himself, consequently degrading himself for the sake of his own ambition.162

With such a compromised view of Bohemond, Komnene is able to mitigate the threat as she creates it:

In the world of our generation this ruse of Bohemond’s was unprecedented and unique, and its purpose was to bring about the downfall of the Roman [Byzantine] Empire. Before it no barbarian or Greek devised such a plan against his enemies, nor, I fancy, will anyone in our lifetime ever see its likes again.163

162 The translation “siege on his nasal faculties” would seem to support such a reading, as if to compare Bohemond’s tricks to siege warfare.
What superficially seems an admiration for Bohemond’s ingenuity and drive are, in context, an anomaly of Bohemond’s uncompromising desire for self-aggrandizement. The implication of Bohemond’s intentions are severe and threatening, yet it sits within an awareness of Bohemond’s desperation and forfeiture of his dignity.

Although Bohemond manages to escape the east, he cannot fully escape Alexios. As Komnene reminds the reader of Alexios’ distant yet advantageous position, she questions whether Bohemond’s scheme can be truly recognized as a success. This scheme carries on until Bohemond and his men reach Corfu, a port on the eastern edge of the Byzantine empire. Having travelled across the empire, Bohemond quits the act and reveals himself to the people of Corfu, demanding that a letter be written to the emperor in his name. In his letter, preserved by Komnene in the conclusion of Book Eleven, Bohemond pities his past misfortunes, revels in his cunning, and threatens to return with the intent of destroying Byzantium.¹⁶⁴ Komnene bookends her conclusion of Bohemond’s travel with remarks on his pride; once he drops the ruse and is met by the people of Corfu, “Bohemond treated them all with lofty disdain and demanded to see the doux of the town,”¹⁶⁵ and as he signs off on his letter to the emperor, Komnene asides, “such was the extreme arrogance in which the barbarian exulted.”¹⁶⁶ Marking Bohemond as arrogant belittles Bohemond’s reaction toward his successful escape. Through Bohemond’s ruse has managed to get him across the

¹⁶⁴ Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 331.
¹⁶⁵ Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 330.
¹⁶⁶ Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 331.
Byzantine empire, Komnene implies that his pride is unmerited. Repeated mentions of Bohemond’s arrogance serve as a subtle reminder of his actual condition as a beaten down enemy on retreat. His self-important attitude points more glaringly to the outright defeat he narrowly escaped.

Bohemond’s letter to Alexios, as presented by Komnene, presents an active threat moderated by Komnene’s rhetorical power as author, which serves as a sort of placeholder in lieu of Alexios’ presence. The letter itself initiates a battle of wits between the two opponents. As previously demonstrated by Alexios, letters, and the rhetoric packed within them, serve as a central tool in deceptions: Alexios’ many letters to Toutakh help usher a peaceful recuperation of eastern territories; carried by Boutoumites, Alexios’ many entreaties, and ultimately a chrysobull declaring his diplomatic intentions, convince the people of Nicaea to make peace with the Byzantine empire and accept its governance. Bohemond too, though in speech rather than in writing, has shown his rhetorical capabilities in forging a key alliance with an enemy defender at Antioch, and deceptively stringing along his countrymen to help secure his hold on the city. Yet this particular letter seems to lack the persuasive elements previously present in Bohemond’s attempts at trickery. Rather than concealing it, Bohemond lays bare his means of escape, writing:

I have escaped your clutches. In the guise of a dead man I have avoided every eye, every hand, every plan. And now I live, I move, I breathe the air, and from this island of Corfu I send to Your Majesty offensive, hateful news. [...] I have handed over the city of Antioch to my nephew Tancred, leaving him as a worthy adversary for your generals. I myself will go to my own country.\(^{167}\)

\(^{167}\) Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 331.
The details that Komnene, as historian, locates for the reader are restated by Bohemond. More surprisingly, Bohemond reveals himself in the process of his deception, not only affirming Komnene’s remarks of his arrogance, but also prematurely ending the trick. In doing so, Bohemond acts as the writer to his own, albeit heretical, gospel, in proclaiming his own resurrection. By letting the emperor in on his secret, Bohemond, in his arrogance, denies himself the full satisfaction of his own ruse, to the advantage of Alexios gaining knowledge over his enemies’ whereabouts. Bohemond still attempts to maintain a sense of secrecy or deception by writing, “as far as you and your friends are concerned, I am a corpse; but to myself and my friends it is manifest that I am a living man, plotting a diabolical end for you. In order to throw the Roman world which you rule into disarray, I who was alive became dead now I who died am alive,” however, the central piece of the trick, his escape, has now been revealed. Bohemond’s fixation on his movements between death and life forces attention toward his scheme. The repetition indicates an attempt on Bohemond’s part to prove himself cunning as he removes all other proof of deception. Moreover, the language of resurrection that Bohemond uses renders explicit the Christological comparison. Bohemond, with a violent threat, concludes, “with many a murder I will make your towns and provinces run with blood, until I set my spear in Byzantium itself.” Bohemond writes to Alexios not to persuade him, but to make war. His aims of self-aggrandizement and violence, normally furthered by his use of deception, now undercut his ruse. In a letter that attempts to communicate the magnitude of his

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168 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 331.
169 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 331.
threat, Bohemond instead reveals his weakness, opening himself up to the very vulnerabilities he was attempting to overcome by deception. As a result, Bohemond’s scheme will not be to his success, but to his undoing.
Chapter 5: A Comic Resolution

The siege of Dyrrakhion becomes the stage upon which the final drama between Alexios and Bohemond unfolds. The battle of Dyrrakhion, the final conflict between Alexios and Bohemond, marks both a culmination and transition in Alexios’ path as both a restorer and trickster. In this culminating battle between two trickster characters, Komnene throws ever greater emphasis on the disparity between the emperor and his rival. Bohemond’s trickery, continually disruptive and chaotic, begins to fail him. His deceptions, which have hinged on creating a grander reality of himself, unravel under Alexios’ knowing gaze. Bohemond’s defeat is an inevitable conclusion under Komnene’s retrospective authorship.

Alexios, on the other hand, continues to show himself to be a different sort of trickster, who masks his true character by ruse. As the conflict between these two men reaches its conclusion, Komnene both brings the narrative to a dramatic peak and transitions into cultivating the final image of Alexios. The figure of Alexios that defeats Bohemond demonstrates a perfection of rhetoric and play-acting strategies, seen as early as Roussel’s pretend blinding. At the same time, Alexios’ ever increasing distance from the battlefield indicates a transition in his path of restoration; having restored peace by defeating the empire’s greatest enemy, Alexios continues his mission on more spiritual grounds.

As promised in his threatening letter to Alexios, Bohemond renews his attack in Dyrrakhion, yet quickly finds himself in a familiar and dire position. At first, Bohemond plays the careful strategist, spending the whole of winter to make preparations and survey the town of Dyrrakhion. Come spring, he and his forces
throw themselves into battle, entirely focused on the siege, yet all of Bohemond’s planning achieves little victory Bohemond takes control of towns neighboring Dyrrakhion and builds various machines of war to aid in attacks and protect his forces, yet the city remains out of his grasp. What is more, Byzantine forces form a blockade on both land and sea in response to Bohemond’s arrival, cutting off access to prospective resources. The surrounding area exhausted by his plundering, Bohemond’s forces diminish greatly under the weight of famine and dysentery. In spite of such dire circumstance, Bohemond continues the siege, relying on a number of inventions to attempt to break the walls of Dyrrakhion. Three times Bohemond reinvigorates the siege with a new weapon, and with each attempt the Byzantine defenders of Dyrrakhion, led by the emperor’s nephew Alexios, defeat Bohemond with inventions of their own.\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 361–66.}

From the beginning of the scene, Komnene suggests Bohemond’s defeat is already at hand, his three attempts at deceptive war tactics each being successfully countered by Byzantine forces. With his first attempt, Bohemond builds an “extraordinary, indescribable object” who’s “very appearance inspired terror.”\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 362.} A terrifying and violent invention, Bohemond at first terrifies and threatens the city with his novel weapon. However, when the machine is put to work, and is revealed to be no more than an ineffective battering ram, the defenders “laughed at the barbarians and the men who handled it […] They threw open the gates and invited them in, as they mocked the repeated blows of the ram.”\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 363.} Because
Bohemond’s terrifying machine fails to live up to its appearance, the discrepancy between appearance and reality is laid bare for the defenders. The failure of this first attempt is then replicated in Bohemond’s second and third attacks on the walls. On the second, Bohemond decides to lead his troops underground in a plot “thought up specifically with this place in mind.”173 Although Komnene credits Bohemond for his strategic planning, she quickly undercuts his efforts, writing, “when the mine had gone far enough, they congratulated themselves as if some great work had been accomplished.”174 Through a typical display of arrogance on the part of Bohemond and his men, Komnene identifies again that the tunnels, despite what they may appear, are in actuality no “great work.” Following suit from Bohemond’s first attempt, his tunneling men are found out and bombarded with chemical fire by the Byzantines. Once again, despite his attempt at deception, the Byzantine defenders see through it; in this case, the Byzantines actually reveal the hidden defenders when opening up holes above the tunnels and attack.

Komnene utilizes Bohemond’s third and final attempt at machine warfare as a symbolic means of comparing Bohemond’s inflated appearance with the reality of Byzantine superiority. Bohemond’s strategy of deception by inflating his appearance loses its efficacy as he is continually beaten back by the Byzantine defenders at Dyrrakhion. Just as with his first attempt, Bohemond again builds a fear-inspiring siege weapon to make war on the walls of Dyrrakhion. Standing as many as five or six cubits taller than the city’s walls, the structure looms over the

173 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 363.
174 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 364.
city. As Norman soldiers inside the tower push it toward the city walls, Komnene describes the spectacle, writing, “Like a giant moving above the clouds it was apparently self-propelled.” In her description of the self-moving tower, Komnene highlights the poor division between appearance and reality. Bohemond deceives onlookers of the tower’s mechanisms in feigning a self-propelling tower, but in being such a strange sight, Bohemond inadvertently calls attention to his attempt to deceive.

As Bohemond’s tower approaches, the Byzantine defenders respond with their own invention, a tower that stands just one cubit higher than that of Bohemond, such that the Byzantines subvert their original condition and loom over Bohemond. Moreover, unlike Bohemond’s tower, covered in ox-hides as to hide the many soldiers inside propelling the tower forward, the Byzantines’ structure remains uncovered, as “there was no need for protection.” The Byzantine forces have no need for deception; literally towering above Bohemond, now twice beaten, a bare demonstration of their reality is enough to combat Bohemond’s frightful yet false appearances. From the top of their tower, the Byzantine defenders pour liquid fire onto the enemy’s contraption, causing a terrible chaos as the soldiers inside struggle to escape. In an uncharacteristically violent conclusion, trickery is barely used to defeat Bohemond’s initial attacks.

As much as Komnene uses the siege Dyrrakhion to demonstrate Bohemond’s weakness, at the same time she highlights Alexios’ increased

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175 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 365.
176 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 366.
177 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 366.
mastery over guile. Although the emperor is virtually absent, never stepping onto
the battlefield nor controlling the strategy from a distance, his presence is
embodied, quite literally, by a second Alexios, the governor of Dyrrakhion and
nephew to the emperor. Like Tatikios and Boutoumites in Nicaea, the nephew
Alexios becomes an extension of the emperor; leading the Byzantine forces with a
strategic precision that emulates his namesake. Under the command of “Alexios,
the strategos of Dyrrakhion, and his soldiers were not caught unprepared.”
Though Komnene is careful to distinguish the emperor and his nephew, the
presence the name Alexios on the page functions rhetorically to evoke the
emperor’s presence. His nephew’s admirable behavior, his courage and strategic
preparation, not only reflects on the far-reaching strength of Alexios’ reign, but
also forges a legacy for Alexios within his lifetime. Alexios’ nephew, carrying his
name and emulating his leadership, is a product of Alexios’ efforts to rehabilitate
the Byzantine state apparatus, which was in disarray when he himself was a
commander.

Although the Byzantines have held the upper hand in the battle over
Dyrrakhion, Alexios plans ultimately to defeat Bohemond by guile. Through this
decision, Komnene solidifies the characterization of her father as comic hero, as
she works to finalize a completed image of him. Watching from a distance,
Alexios devises “a new stratagem to use against the barbarians, […] convinced
that there should be a rest from large-scale fighting.”

178 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 365.
179 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 366.

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rather than force, to achieve victory over his rival. Wrapped within Alexios’ preference for trickery is also his continued desire to prevent unnecessary violence. Echoing Alexios’ defeat of Roussel in the opening of the narrative, Komnene shows her father removing himself from violence as conflict escalates, opting for another solution. In recognizing Bohemond as “a man of great cunning and energy” Alexios, despite being “prepared to meet him face to face in battle […] was perpetually seeking ways and means of dealing with [Bohemond] which were entirely different.”

At this moment, Alexios has the military power to overtake Bohemond by force, yet he recognizes Bohemond for the trickster that he is. Having witnessed Bohemond’s sneaky escape by coffin shortly after taking Antioch, Alexios uses his wit to ensure that the battle of Dyrrakhion will be his final confrontation with Bohemond. Such a strategy will be all the more praiseworthy once Alexios demonstrates the superiority of his wit over the greatest trickster of his time. Komnene then seeks to showcase the superiority of her father’s as he finally restores peace to the empire, triumphing over his most formidable opponent in the style of the comic hero.

In his determination to defeat Bohemond completely, Alexios calls upon elements of his previous strategies and synthesizes them within a single, complex plot. The key element remains the written word: through forged letters, Alexios intends to trick Bohemond into thinking that his men have been plotting against him. Alexios crafts these letters such that it appears that he is writing in reply to Bohemond’s closest and most trusted allies. The letters, filled with thanks and

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180 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 367.
references to their intentions, imply that Bohemond’s men had written to the emperor seeking friendship with Alexios and disclosing damaging information about Bohemond. In reality, however, no such correspondence had ever occurred between Alexios and Bohemond’s men. Once the letters are crafted, Alexios calls upon a number of western counts who have proven themselves loyal to their oaths, and asks them for their two most trustworthy servants, who are to act as envoys. Each envoy is given a letter and instructed to deliver it to the respective addressee in the enemy camp. As these messengers set off, Alexios then tasks one of his own men to enter the camp. This third man is to go directly to Bohemond and pretend to be a deserter and traitor to Alexios, openly accusing Bohemond’s men for betraying him and siding with the detested Alexios. Now aware of the letters, Bohemond usurps the envoys before they have a chance to deliver their letters. By this complex coordination of subordinates, Alexios is able to deliver the letters to the actual intended recipient, while giving the appearance that these letters were never meant to be seen by Bohemond at all.\(^\text{181}\)

During the careful preparation of each component of his plan, Komnene shows Alexios at his most thoughtful and intentional. With restoration as his perpetual goal, Alexios denies any opportunity for disorder or chaos within his trickster-like strategies. As his first measure, Alexios reshapes the battlefield by taking advantage of the Byzantine blockade around Dyrrakhion. He repositions his forces—led by trustworthy officers—along the mountain ridges, and unnavigable valleys and passes to create a kind of no man’s land separating the

\(^{181}\) Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 367–69.
two armies. In addition to avoiding the possibility for large-scale battle, “the object of this new strategy was to prevent easy access from our side to Bohemond, and also to stop letters reaching our army from the enemy or the sending of friendly greetings.” By effectively cutting off all communications between the two armies, Alexios prevents any chance of betrayal or treachery, the type of trick carried out by Bohemond and the Armenian defender at Antioch becomes impossible at Dyrrakhion.

Using the metaphor of theater, Alexios prepares to direct his biggest and most complex production yet, requiring perfect coordination between his actors for a flawless performance. With so many actors on stage, loyalty and trust become key as Alexios leverages his own loyalties in his attempt to breakdown Bohemond’s. After setting the stage, Alexios gathers and prepares his actors. Primarily using his western allies, Alexios calls upon three men in particular:

“Roger (one of the most illustrious franks) and Peter Aliphas, […] whose loyalty to the emperor was absolutely dependable,” as well as the Sebastos Marinos Neapolites. Though loyalty is an essential factor in all of Alexios’ trickster-like strategies, it takes on increased importance as Alexios turns to the men that he previously doubted in Nicaea. His network of allies has expanded to incorporate even those who were not initially as trustworthy. In addition to disclosing his plan to these westerners, Alexios also asks each of the counts to “provide one of his most faithful, a man who knew how to hold his tongue” to act as envoys.

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182 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 366.
183 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 367.
184 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 367.
Komnene expands Alexios’ power of delegation through networks of loyalty; it is the subordinates of his allies who will carry out the plot on the ground. The chain of loyalty that connects servant to emperor is what powers Alexios’ plan. As a result, relying on these western counts, his vassals by oath, holds both a practical and symbolic application. Speaking strategically, Alexios makes use of his western allies to create a more convincing performance; it is the westerners’ subordinates who act as envoys, not Alexios’ men. As a result, Alexios creates the illusion that these western envoys had originally been sent by Bohemond’s faithful men and are now returning with the reply. At the same time, Alexios’ cooperation with the western counts contrasts Bohemond’s isolating behaviors at Antioch; Alexios is able to forge better and more trusting partnerships with Bohemond’s kinsman than Bohemond himself.

When it comes to crafting the letters, Alexios engages and perfects what Nortwick identifies as a typical trickster ploy; Alexios “uses words to rearrange the world,”\textsuperscript{185} subverting Bohemond’s existing conceptions of his men. In describing the letters, Komnene shows her father as a master of his craft:

One would suppose on reading [the letters] that these men had written to the emperor, trying to win his friendship and disclosing the private intentions of the tyrant […]. The letters sent to them were fraudulent, for the emperor had received no communication at all of this kind from them […]. It was he himself who had come up with the idea of the letters and their content.\textsuperscript{186}

In forging a correspondence between himself and Bohemond’s closest allies, Alexios creates a new reality, which implicates Bohemond’s allies as


\textsuperscript{186} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 368.
traitors, and as a result challenges Bohemond’s preexisting conception of his men as loyal to a fault. What is more, Alexios’ letters also prove successful in implicating Bohemond’s men without their knowledge.\textsuperscript{187} Though he only has half of the correspondence at his disposal, Alexios is able claim Bohemond’s own men as his allies and transform Bohemond’s self-centered strategy from an advantage to a detriment. Additionally, Komnene endows Alexios sole authorship over the letters, both in their conception and in their writing, signaling that the emperor alone has the guile necessary for a deception of such magnitude. Komnene then projects the impact of such letters, writing, “This play-acting had a purpose: if it came to Bohemond’s ears that such men were traitorous, […] he would at once be thrown into confusion.”\textsuperscript{188} The language of “play-acting,” which Komnene has employed only once before to describe Alexios’ performance of pretending to blind Roussel, returns to the idea of drama and theater. Alexios’ letters allow him to manipulate appearances with the consequence of altering reality. As a result, Alexios creates chaos in Bohemond’s world, outplaying the trickster at his own game. He reverses their roles such that it is no longer the trickster Bohemond threatening the stability of the empire, but the trickster Alexios threatening the stability of Bohemond’s offensive. As Alexios rearranges the world, he rights its course, restoring peace to empire.

The sense of “play-acting”\textsuperscript{189} that begins with Alexios’ letter writing crystalizes in Alexios’ orchestration of the actions of his men. Just as with

\textsuperscript{188} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 368.
\textsuperscript{189} Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 368.
Boutoumites and Tatikios in Nicaea, Alexios is able to command loyalty in a way that Bohemond could never do. But rather than his men deviating from the plan or creating their own unsuccessful schemes, each messenger performs acts “according to the emperor’s instructions,” fulfilling their loyalty to the emperor and enabling the success of his trick. First, Alexios instructs the western envoys to deliver the letters to their proper addressees. At the same time, Alexios sends one of his own trustworthy men to approach Bohemond and pretend that he was a deserter […]. He was to feign friendship for Bohemond and even a certain cordiality by openly accusing the persons to whom the letters were addressed, saying that [they] had broken their oath of allegiance to him.  

Then, in pretending to have Bohemond’s best interests at heart, the false traitor then alters Bohemond of the oncoming messengers. Because Alexios feels a self-imposed “duty to protect from harm’s way these men,” he requires his deserter to swear an oath to Bohemond to ensure the safety of the messengers before he gives any additional information. As a result, even while Alexios’ plot creates chaos, such disruptions lead into the task of re-ordering, rather than devolving into further chaos and violence. The oath made, the deserter tells Bohemond where the messengers are, Bohemond sends out his men to usurp the messengers before they can reach the enemy camp, and the letters fall into the hands of their intended recipient. 

Upon apprehending the western envoys and reading the letters for himself, Bohemond’s sense of reality is shaken, and his resulting panic and doubt confine

190 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 369.  
191 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 369.
and paralyze him. The rhetoric on the page causes a physical reaction within Bohemond; he reads the letters and “becoming fain, almost collapsed, for he believed they were genuine.”  

The correspondence that Alexios constructs on paper holds real implications; in constructing a new reality, Alexios’ rhetoric transcends the page and enters the physical world, demonstrated by Bohemond’s dramatic and extremely physical reaction. Shaken by the implication that his men have been communicating with Alexios behind his back, Bohemond “did not leave his tent for six days, debating what he should do, turning over in his mind numerous possible courses.”  

Already trapped in by the Byzantine blockade, Bohemond is further confined by his own attempt to respond in cunning. Komnene draws a parallel between the events of Dyrrakhion and Antioch; just as Bohemond crammed himself in a coffin to escape from Antioch, he once against traps himself in reaction to Alexios’ tricks. However, confined with in his tent, wracked with questions and doubts, Bohemond is paralyzed and a dramatic escape is impossible. Without certainty in the loyalty of his men, his confinement is more solitary, limiting, and unproductive than that which he experienced in his coffin. Though Bohemond ultimately resolves to maintain a sense of status quo and allows his men to remain at their posts, the world that Alexios put forward in his letters remains uncontested. As Bohemond attempts to confidently stand by his original sense of reality, he remains haunted by the possibility that his men have betrayed him.

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192 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 369.
193 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 369.
As the drama of Alexios’ letters unfold, Komnene digresses briefly to discuss in general the merits of trickery. Speaking directly to the reader, Komnene recalls Alexios’ past victories by guile, while also referring to a larger cultural knowledge of successful tricksters, writing:

As we know full well, a general’s supreme task is to win, not merely by force of arms, but also by relying on treaties, and there is another way—sometimes, in the right circumstances, an enemy can be beaten by fraud. The emperor seems to have relied on this on this occasion.194

The mention of “a general’s supreme tasks” potentially refers to the literary model of the myths of Alexander the Great carried by the Alexander Romance. Komnene does not hesitate to name her father’s strategy ‘fraud,’ yet she is careful to warn that fraud may not be a reliable tactic and may, even in the proper conditions, not bring success. But in introducing the pitfalls of fraud, Komnene elevates her father as the one man who finds success in the tactic. Bohemond, serving as the archetype of the trickster, has so far failed to win with such a strategy. It is Alexios, as both a comic hero and man of guile, who can use trickery to accomplish his “supreme task,” not just to win, but to restore peace and glory to the Byzantine Empire.

In addition to the confusion caused by Alexios’ letters, Bohemond also continues to encounter trouble on the battlefield. The blockade still in place, Bohemond’s men find themselves wracked by famine and plague. Smaller skirmishes continue as Byzantine troops posted around the periphery attack any enemy troops who attempt to leave their encampment in search of resources. While Bohemond is trapped with his men, “the emperor meanwhile sat like a

194 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 367.
spectator […]], although his heart and soul was with his fighting men, sharing in their sweat and toil.” Alexios is both audience member and author, watching a play unfold that he has written; the play-acting that Komnene praises now becomes the new reality of war as Bohemond is pushed toward his inevitable defeat and a comic resolution, the restoration of peace within the empire, comes into full view. Alexios proves himself a competent and successful military leader all while avoiding direct combat. His army decimated, and at last coming to the realization “that the war was being successfully pursued against him with much skill,” Bohemond sues for peace, resigned to the superior cunning of the emperor. Alexios secures victory with minimal violence, concluding his dealings with Bohemond by a “comic,” or restorative, resolution.

Once Alexios becomes aware that Bohemond has sued for peace to the local byzantine leader of Dyrrakhion, the emperor sends a letter that both chastises Bohemond and establishes the conditions of opening dialogue:

> You know perfectly well how many times I have been deceived through trusting your oaths and promises. And if the Holy Gospel did not command Christians in all things to forgive one another, I would not have opened my ears to your proposition. I do not therefore reject your plea. If you do in truth desire peace, if you do indeed abominate the absurd and impossible thing that you have attempted, and if you no longer take pleasure in shedding the blood of Christians, not for the benefit of your own country nor for that of the Christians, but to satisfy

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195 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 378.
196 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 378.
the whim of yourself alone and of nobody else, then come in person with as many companions as you like. The distance between us is not great. Whether in the course of negotiations we agree on the same terms, or even disagree, you will in any case return to your camp unharmed according to my promise.\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 379.}

It is worth reproducing the content of the letter in full to demonstrate how Komnene unites her constructions of Alexios as both comic hero and trickster. In compelling Bohemond to enter peace negotiations, Alexios’ letter fully disarms Bohemond as a trickster. As will be shown in the subsequent paragraphs, Komnene uses this letter to both firmly situate Alexios within the legacy of mythicized tricksters and initiate a shift toward spiritual and Christian concerns as Alexios concludes his restorative work in the geopolitical realm.

As Alexios proclaims, “you know perfectly well how many times I have been deceived,” he un_masks Bohemond for what he truly is and denies him the stage needed to perform his tricks. In the metaphor of stagecraft, Alexios triumphs as sole actor and author as his performance overtakes Bohemond’s; he removes Bohemond from action and assigns him to the role of spectator. As Alexios strips away Bohemond’s deceptive façade, he is then able to directly accuse Bohemond of proceeding “to satisfy the whim of yourself alone.” The power of deception taken away, Bohemond can no longer hide his self-centered ambition. If “the trickster is usually a force for change; the world is a different place when leaves than when he came,”\footnote{Van Nortwick, “The Ward of Hermes: Odysseus as Trickster,” 86.} then in being revealed, Bohemond fails to fulfill his role as a trickster. As he is cornered and accused by Alexios, Bohemond’s mission to

\footnote{Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, \textit{The Alexiad}, 379.}
\footnote{Van Nortwick, “The Ward of Hermes: Odysseus as Trickster,” 86.}
overtake the Byzantine empire crumbles; Alexios paves over Bohemond’s
disruption and chaos.

The use of writing and rhetoric is far from a new device, but in having
Alexios directly confront Bohemond in writing, Komnene evokes the tradition of
Greek comic heroes, which then culminates in Alexios’ triumph. Writing in reply
to Bohemond’s suit for peace, Alexios’ response mirrors the rhetorical outwitting
Alexander the Great performs in his correspondence with his enemy Darius, as
preserved in the Greek Alexander Romance. In a series of letters exchanged in
quick succession, Alexander the Great and the Persian King Darius attempt to
outwit each other, Alexander always managing to gain the upper hand. Alexios
and Bohemond engage in a parallel correspondence, Komnene endowing her
father with the role of the Macedonian conqueror. As Alexios’ final piece of
written correspondence before the creation of the treaty, Komnene embeds echoes
of Alexander the Great’s last letter to Darius. As the battle pitches between the
Macedonians and the Persians, Alexander writes to his enemy:

Your empty ravings and your vain and babbling sermons are hateful to the
gods, through and through. Are you not ashamed of your blasphemous and
vain invectives? […] My crown is not worth yours to gain. You will not
prevent me from being respectful in my treatment of all people […]. This
will be my last letter to you.

Both Alexios’ and Alexander’s writings demean the recipient and elevate
the author. Alexios’ compassionate impulse becomes a link to the mythic
Alexander; his high regard for human life, praiseworthy in itself, is added proof of
Alexios’ position within a legacy of cunning heroes and great rulers. The

201 Pseudo-Callisthenes, 99.
Christian rhetoric also finds its foothold in the Hellenic myth; Alexander’s accusations of heresy are Christianized by Komnene’s pen.\textsuperscript{202}

Finally, in mediating her father’s rhetoric through the lens of the Holy Gospel, Komnene initiates the process of recasting her father. As he offers forgiveness in accordance with the commands of the Holy Gospel, Alexios emanates a Christ-like compassion for his enemy. Then, as Alexios questions, “If you do indeed abominate the absurd and impossible thing,” he writes as if to compel Bohemond to recant a heresy. As Bohemond’s defeat marks the end of Alexios’ struggle with the First Crusade, Alexios proves himself the rightful Christian leader; Bohemond, in obeyance with his faith, must amend accordingly.\textsuperscript{203} Though Bohemond’s surrender closes the chapter on Alexios’ military restoration, it simultaneously propels the narrative into Alexios’ final battle: a battle against heresy.

Alexios’ final military opponent defeated, Komnene lays the groundwork for her father’s final restorative efforts, directed toward the resuscitation of Orthodoxy within empire. Alexios embeds his compassion for others within a Christian framework, as his opposition against violence is cast as a defense of Christian lives.

\textsuperscript{202} Buckley, \textit{The Alexiad of Anna Komnene}, 244.
\textsuperscript{203} Buckley, 244.
Chapter 6: “The Last Act”204

While this thesis has largely focused on the ways Komnene presents her father as a comic hero in the context of his military exploits and the restoration of the state, the text also carries a narrative of spiritual restoration, in which Alexios restores piety and saves the souls of his fellow Christians as the “vicar of Christ.”205 While Komnene talks of her father’s efforts to stamp out heresy and restore Christian piety as early as Book Five, in which she accounts the trial and condemnation of the heretic Italos, eschatological meanings come into full force with the appearance of the First Crusade. As Buckley argues, Komnene structures the arrival of the Crusaders and the subsequent Norman invasions as a threat against Alexios, rendering him “the true Christian emperor.”206 Not only does the defeat of Bohemond at Dyrrakhion symbolize the completion of Alexios’ efforts of geopolitical restoration, but it also solidifies Alexios ascendency over the Church in the East.207

Entering Book Fifteen, which recounts Alexios’ final acts as emperor, Komnene turns away from the military and instead focuses on eschatological concerns. Within this transition, she maintains Alexios’ character as a comic hero, engaging in the same use of theatrics and rhetoric. Thus, his final act as emperor signifies the comic resolution to his reign. Buckley encapsulates this transition within her own analysis, writing:

acting maybe the tool of the imposter but it is the prerogative as well of the properly constituted Christian emperor, who ‘enacts’ his rule by

204 This chapter title is borrowed from Buckley, 270.  
205 Buckley, 190.  
207 Buckley, The Alexiad of Anna Komnene, 244.
impersonating the Saviour whom he represents. [...] Book Fifteen takes this principle to its extreme. 208

Because Bohemond’s defeat achieves a sense of restoration—Alexios concludes his military campaigns and with it his efforts of territorial re-expansion—Komnene, further imbuing her father in the image of Christ, concludes the narrative of her father with the spiritual restoration of empire. Alexios continues to employ the same trickster-like techniques, but this time with a new goal in mind: the restoration of Christian piety and Orthodoxy in empire.

Alexios’ reign ends with the entrance of a new threat to empire: a group of heretics known as the Bogomils. Combining the ideologies of the Manicheans and Massalians, the Bogomils build their doctrine from “what was the most evil, most worthless, now merged together,” 209 and stand as a formidable threat against the hegemony of the Eastern Church. The heretical doctrine spreads rapidly through the empire, with Basil, the leader of the sect, proving himself the most adept at spreading the heresy.

Though the nature of conflict shifted away from the military and toward the spiritual and eschatological instead, Komnene maintains the essential structure of conflict in the advent of this new threat; Alexios must combat and out-maneuver another trickster character. At the same time, Komnene exaggerates and dramatizes her description of the Bogomils; her account is constantly attuned to the theological theme. The Bogomils, led by Basil, as hostile outsiders, have the intention of subverting and disrupting the order of the Church. In short, the

208 Buckley, 244.
209 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, The Alexiad, 455.
Bogomils have all the characteristics of the trouble-making trickster (No84). In demonstrating these characteristics, Komnene fills her description of the Bogomils with biblical allusion. The Bogomils descend upon the church “as an extraordinary cloud of heretics,”210 akin to a biblical plague of locusts. Komnene then describes the Bogomils as “an unpleasant race, like a serpent lurking in its hole.”211 Though the heretical doctrine is a threat contained within the empire, Komnene renders them as other, further marginalizing the group. The image of the serpent recalls the fall from Eden; just as the cunning serpent deceives Adam and Eve and causes their fall from grace, so to do the Bogomils threaten to deceive the subjects of the Byzantine empire through their heretical doctrine.

In identifying the Bogomils as a threat, Komnene begins to draw a connection between the beginning and end of her father’s reign. She bluntly accuses the Bogomils of deceit, writing that the doctrine:

was in existence before my father’s time, but it went unnoticed, since the Bogomil sect is most adept at feigning virtue […] their wickedness is hidden beneath cloak and cowl […] inside he’s a ravenous wolf.212

The mention of an empire before Alexios mirrors Komnene’s initial descriptions of the empire under the reign of Romanos Diogenes and Michael Doukas; the Bogomils are the last remaining relic of an era of imperial decline. As a result, Komnene suggests that Alexios’ reign ends how it began: with a successful reversal of imperial decline brought about by his immediate predecessors. The threat the Bogomils present, though put in exaggerated terms, mirror that of

210 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 455.
211 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 455.
212 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 455.
Bohemond, and even Roussel. They are actors; the religious garb of “cloak and cowl” are the costume and mask that hide their true selves and disguise their intentions.

In his final act as emperor, Alexios determines to use guile to defeat the Bogomils. As the heresy of the Bogomils becomes increasingly pervasive, it becomes clear Basil is the most adept at spreading the doctrine. Alexios institutes an inquiry into the heresy, finding and questioning the accused Bogomils, all of whom name Bohemond as their leader. Alexios then tasks a group of men with finding Basil and bringing him to Constantinople. However, rather than imprisoning the heretic, Alexios entertains him as an honored guest. For Alexios’ final one-on-one confrontation, he relies on his mastery over rhetoric and performance to convince Basil to share his heretical doctrine out of his own volition. To achieve this, Alexios and his brother Isaac pretend to be potential converts, feigning interest in Basil’s teaching. The two men entertain Basil in the innermost room in the palace, walled off by a curtain, and shower the heretic with false compliments and praise in order to coax him to reveal his beliefs. All the while, behind the curtain, a hypogrammateus sits behind the curtain, writing down the entire exchange without Basil’s knowledge. Once Basil is finally manipulated into divulging his doctrine, the scribe effectively produces a written confession of heresy.
Komnene represents the exchange between Basil and Alexios as two actors playing off each other. Basil, “so practiced in villainy,” feigns piety just as well as any other Bogomil. Alexios, in response, performs the inverse:

The emperor feigned a desire to become his disciple and […] his brother, the Sebastokrator Isaac, also led Basil on. Alexios therefore pretended to regard all his sayings as some divine oracle and gave way to every argument; his one hope, he said, was that the wretched Basil would effect his soul’s salvation.

At all times, Alexios is performing, and Anna is careful to bring that performance to the forefront. Alexios dons the appearance of potential convert, lowering himself to the role of humble student and wretched soul. Through his deception, Alexios intends to instead act as the savior for the sake of his fellow Christians. As a result, when Alexios employs a rhetoric specifically designed to convince Basil to confess, he is outperforming his rival actor to the point where he unmasks Basil’s true character. Komnene again names this tactic “play-acting,” indicating to the reader that Alexios is engaging in a performance with the intent on re-ordering and restoring the world around him, and in this case, potentially bringing salvation.

Alexios’ success in compelling Basil to confess his heresy allows Komnene to expand the stage of the narrative to take note of the setting, directing the reader’s attention to the curtain dividing Alexios and his guest from the outside world. In doing so, she reveals that a scribe has been positioned out of view, recording every word. The scribe is hidden “behind the curtain” which

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213 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 456.
214 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 456.
215 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 457.
216 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 457.
divides the room and obscures Basil’s vision. It is as if Basil becomes an audience member to his own deception; he delights in Alexios’ play acting, unaware of the scribe who is positioned off-stage but nevertheless playing an essential role. In showing the disconnect between appearance and reality, Komnene writes, “The fool, to all appearances, was the teacher, while the emperor played the part of the student and the lesson was committed to writing by the hypogrammateus.”\(^{217}\) Alexios’ plan hinges on his ability to manipulate appearances and disguise realities; his “play-acting” becomes part of a larger strategy of altering appearances. The tension between naming Basil a “fool” and then a “teacher,” furthers this sense of disconnect.

Once Basil has divulged his heretical beliefs and reveals his true character, Alexios quickly, “threw off his pretense and drew back the curtain.”\(^{218}\) Through this sudden and dramatic reveal, Komnene demonstrates how, even in the evolution of his character, Alexios remains firmly within the type of the comic hero. In drawing back the curtain, the deception cracks, and Alexios re-orders the world. The intimate setting of the reveal, inside a private room, echoes the similarly intimate setting where Alexios revealed to his cousin Dokeianos that he had never really blinded Roussel. In connecting Alexios’ first act of guile to his last, Komnene maintains a sense of her father’s “humanity and artifice”\(^{219}\) throughout. Basil stands trial; the scribe’s recordings serve as incontestable proof. Despite his guilt, Basil is offered the opportunity to recant both during the trial,

\(^{217}\) Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 547.
\(^{218}\) Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 547.
\(^{219}\) Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 15.
and after. Though Basil proves himself inexorable, and is subsequently committed to prison, Alexios continues to attempt to save Basil from his heresy:

Many times the emperor sent for [Basil], many times called upon him to renounce his wickedness; but to all the emperor’s pleadings he remained unmoved. In a final confrontation between two tricksters, Alexios maintains himself as the model for the only correct way of using artifice while maintaining justice and integrity. No longer acting, Alexios, through his attempts to convince Basil to recant and save his soul, proves his compassionate character. Though Basil refuses to give up the Bogomil dogma, his trial and condemnation depict the well-ordered Byzantine state effectively purging itself of the threat of disruption and transgression. It is not Alexios himself who judges Basil, but a conference “of all the Senate, the military establishment and the elders of the Church.” As a result, Komnene demonstrates how much the Byzantine state as changed since the rise of Alexios to the throne; the disordered and declining Byzantine State shown in the opening pages of the narrative now shows its regained authority as Alexios’ reign reaches its close.

220 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 458.
221 Komnene, Sewter, and Frankopan, 457.
Conclusion:

This thesis has attempted to remedy the tension between Alexios’ mission of imperial restoration and his use of trickery to achieve such a mission by showing how Komnene works to characterize her father as a comic hero. Trickery, rather than a detriment to Alexios’ character, becomes the means by which Alexios’ is first distinguished from his peers and elevated within Byzantine society. As he rises to the difficulties of imperial reign, his heroic task of imperial restoration, Alexios use of deception, persuasion, and manipulation enables him to not only defeat his trickster opponents by outwitting them, but also undo the chaos caused by his opponents’ ambitions, restoring and recovering the world of the narrative from a state of chaos and violence.

The introduction posed that this thesis serves as a sort of counterargument to Buckley’s work in calling to attention the trickster-like aspects of Alexios’ character. In resolving the tension between Alexios the restorer and Alexios the clever king by naming Alexios a comic hero, another tension comes to the fore: Buckley does not see comedic narrative within the Alexiad, rather, in her reading, Komnene presents a work of “mixed genre” dominated by the two genres of “tragedy and history.”

In identifying the work as a mixture of history and tragedy, Buckley argues that Komnene writes as “the classical dramatist and the classical historian,” who uses both roles to “embrace at once the urgent movement of tragedy imitating time and the analytic retrospect of history.” In engaging the

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223 Buckley, 38.
mode of tragedy, Komnene can evoke emotion and drama within the narrative as if the events are taking place in an immediate present. Alexios is crafted to be an actor in a drama, enacting the events of his reign through an inescapable linearity. More like the tragic hero than the comic, Alexios cannot overcome the circumstances of his fate.

The linear time scheme imposed by the tragedy is made increasingly clear as Alexios reaches the end of his reign. As Komnene begins the task of describing her father’s death, she writes, “I remember certain remarks made by my father which discouraged me from writing history, inviting me rather to compose elegies and dirges.” In his immediate present, Alexios does not view himself within the larger narrative framework of history. Alexios’ death is the loss and end of his empire. However, it would seem that the drama of tragedy would prevent a narrative of restoration. Because “the tragic venue insists on a world of linear, irreversible time,” the genre would deny the possibility of a narrative of restoration. In tragedy, change becomes irrevocable.

A possible means of remedying the tension between the historic and tragic could be to overlay the historic and the comic. Though the character Alexios, like an actor in a play, is experiencing the immediacy of time, Komnene, as historian and narrator, can use the privilege of hindsight to see how Alexios is actually performing a comedy. The fullness of Alexios’ restoration is brought about by

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Komnene’s history. As a result, Komnene writes in a mixed genre in order to show that the history of her father ultimately holds a comic arc.
Bibliography


