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"Into the Sea of Forgetfulness:" An Analysis of Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* in Relation to the First Crusade

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Abstract: Anna Komnene's account of the First Crusade in her work, *The Alexiad*, provides invaluable insight into the Byzantine perspective of this pivotal event defining the 11th century. While shunned in a monastery, she wrote her celebrated work known as *The Alexiad*. Anna's primary motivation for writing the biography stems from her desire to emphasize the accomplishments of her father, especially in regards to protecting the Byzantine Empire against invaders, both Latin and Turkish. For Anna, the crusade functions as a Western pretext for taking land away from the Byzantines. Comparing specific sieges in the First Crusade to their Latin counterparts provides a significantly more nuanced comprehension of the Crusades from a Christian perspective. Anna's Byzantine perspective contradicts the simplified characterization of the First Crusade as a united Christian front against the Muslim forces.

In December of 1083, Princess Anna Komnene (1083-1153) was born to Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Komnenos (1057-1118) and Empress Irene Doukaina (1066-1138). Her birth solidified the union between the two powerful Byzantine houses of Komnenos and Doukas. She became heir to the throne upon her birth and held the title until the birth of her younger brother John in 1087. Her status as Princess afforded Anna the highest standard of education. Her education included—but was not limited to—mathematics, ancient philosophy, and literature. Throughout her life, Anna believed and maintained that she was the legitimate heir of her father. Despite this, when Alexius died on the 15th of August, 1118, Anna's brother John ascended the throne. Scornful, Anna, with the aid of her mother, tried to usurp her brother's title and position. When John became aware of the schemes afoot, he swiftly sent both Anna and her mother to a monastery to rid himself of the threat they posed. Within the walls of the monastery, Anna began what is arguably the most comprehensive biography of Alexius I's life.¹ Her work, known as *The Alexiad*, is masterfully constructed using rhetoric and allusions, both mythological and biblical, to paint an almost saintly and, most certainly, triumphant image of her father and his reign. Found within the pages of *The Alexiad* are accounts of the First Crusade.² These accounts offer an uniquely Byzantine perspective to the happenings of the crusade. Komnene describes in detail the inner-workings of the Byzantine Empire and its leaders' relations with the crusading Franks. As a chronicle of the First Crusade, Anna Komnene's *Alexiad* provides invaluable detail and insight into the Byzantine perspective, underscoring the tension and strained relationship between the Eastern and Western Churches. Comparing Anna's *Alexiad* to the Latin Frankish sources provides clarity and a more well-rounded understanding of the alliance between the West and East that allowed the First Crusade to transpire.

¹ Herrin, Judith. "Anna Komnene." In *Byzantium: The Surprising Life of a Medieval Empire*, 232–41. Princeton University Press, 2007.

² Books X–XIII of *The Alexiad* contain crusade accounts.

Historical analysis necessitates scrutiny. When dissecting historical texts, one must carefully consider the author and their intentions. An author's objective will no doubt skew their perception of the historical events they record. In the case of Anna Komnene, she writes her *Alexiad* with the purpose of memorializing her father's reign. In the first pages of her work she writes, "...I intend in this writing of mine to recount the deeds done by my father so they should certainly not be lost in silence, or swept away, as it were, on the current of time into the sea of forgetfulness...."³ While Princess Anna's stated purpose was to record the achievements of her father, she no doubt has ulterior motives. Throughout her work she attempts to persuade readers of the religious superiority of both the Eastern church and of her father the emperor. In addition, the death of her husband Nikephoros Bryennios (1062-1137) motivated her to complete the work. Ever the dutiful daughter and wife, Princess Anna felt the responsibility to complete Nikephoros' writings. As she has taken up the mantle of completing the work of her husband, an official Byzantine historian, Princess Anna hopes to assure the reader of her unbiased accounts with the declaration, "He who undertakes the 'role' of an historian must sink his personal likes and dislikes...he must never shirk either blaming his friends or praising his enemies."⁴ While undoubtedly biased, her statements show an astute acknowledgement of the impartiality that every historian should strive for when recording history. Despite her assertions regarding the role of historians, Komnene clearly uses the *Alexiad* to persuade readers of the Byzantine Empire's righteousness and its strength under her father's reign.

Beginning in Book X of *The Alexiad*, Komnene starts to address the First Crusade and its relationship to the Byzantine Empire. She first remarks on the sheer magnitude of pilgrims.

³ Comnena, Anna. *The Alexiad of the Princess Anna Comnena: Being the History of the Reign of Her Father, Alexius I, Emperor of the Romans, 1081-1118 A.D.* Translated by Elizabeth A. S. Dawes. New York: AMS Press, 1978, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Komnene writes of the crusaders heading East: “For the whole of the West and all the barbarian tribes...had all migrated in a body and were marching into Asia through the intervening Europe, and were making the journey with all their household.”⁵ Firstly, Komnene’s assertion aligns with the Western sources that tell of the large number of people, both alone and with accompanying family members and household servants, that went on the journey across Europe to the Holy Land. Additionally, the princess perceives the number of crusaders as an imminent threat to the security and sovereignty of the Byzantine Empire. In the context of *The Alexiad*, she views the crusaders as an added problem facing the empire in addition to internal political conflict and the foreign Turkish threat.⁶ Komnene makes mention of the logistical problems that the Franks cause throughout *The Alexiad*. Interestingly, she raises the concern about how to logistically supply such a mass quantity of people. As Helen J. Nicholson, a crusade historian, writes, “[Anna’s] focus is on hidden agendas and the long-term consequences for Byzantium.”⁷ For the princess, the First Crusade has significantly more political and logistical implications for the Byzantines than it has religious implications. Throughout *The Alexiad*, Princess Anna’s judgment of the crusade is always in relation to the burden it places on the Byzantine Empire.

The Alexiad provides a unique interpretation of the origin of the First Crusade. In Komnene’s view, the crusade was spearheaded by a certain Peter the Hermit. She writes:

“The reason of this upheaval was more or less the following. A certain Frank, Peter by name...had gone to worship at the Holy Sepulchre and after suffering many things at the hands of the Turks and Saracens who were ravaging Asia, he got back to his own country with difficulty. However, he saw that he ought not to make the journey to the Holy Sepulchre alone again, lest worse things befall him, so he worked out a cunning plan. This was to preach in all the Latin countries that ‘the voice of God bids me announce to all the Counts in France that they should all leave their homes and set out to worship at

⁵ *The Alexiad*, p. 268.

⁶ France, J. “Anna Comneno, *The Alexiad* and the First Crusade,” *Reading Medieval Studies* 10, (1984): 20-38, p. 21.

⁷ Nicholson, Helen J. *Women and the Crusades*. Oxford University Press, 2023, p. 195.

the Holy Sepulchre, and to endeavour wholeheartedly with hand and mind to deliver Jerusalem from the hand of the Hagarenes.' And he really succeeded. For after inspiring the souls of all with this quasi-divine command he contrived to assemble the Franks from all sides...".⁸

The most striking and telling aspect of Komnene's claim lies in the fact that she makes no mention of the pope and his contribution to the initiation of the crusade. Pope Urban II's (1088-1099) speech at the Council of Clermont (1095) is pointed to in many of the Western sources as the catalyst for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Her failure to mention the role of the pope could be simply attributed to confusion as to how the crusade began. Contrarily, the princess may have been attempting to minimize the role of the pope as to not give religious legitimacy to the Latin church and its pilgrimage. Additionally in this section, Princess Anna firmly establishes that she does not believe in the First Crusade's divine inspiration, but instead posits that the movement had entirely secular motivations. The crusade had purely personal inspirations according to Princess Anna, with Peter only preaching for people to join him on his pilgrimage to the Holy Land so that he would have greater protection against a Turkish attack. Author and Byzantinist H el ene Ahrweiler writes of the Eastern perspective of the role of the pope in the crusade. She writes, "The crusade launched by the pope, was above all for the Byzantines was a symbol of the usurpation of imperial power by the spiritual leader who thus committed a quasi-sacrilege."⁹ Komnene's use of the phrases "quasi-divine" and "contrived" shows her doubt of a religious justification for the First Crusade. Komnene does however recognize that an overarching goal of the crusade is the liberation of the Holy Land from its Muslim rulers. In this way, her view aligns with the Western sources. Lastly, comparing Komnene's judgment of Peter the Hermit to the Western accounts reveals that the Western sources—especially that of Abbot Guibert of Nogent—are similarly skeptical about Peter. While

⁸ *The Alexiad*, p. 249.

⁹ Ahrweiler, H el ene. *L'id eologie Politique de L'empire Byzantin*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1975, p. 79.

the Western sources describe Peter as a leader of the “People’s Crusade,”¹⁰ there is general confusion about his origin and motivations. Guibert of Nogent writes, “We saw him going through the cities and towns under the pretense of preaching.”¹¹ Nogent’s assertion aligns with Komnene’s skepticism of the holy nature of Peter’s motivations. Komnene’s explanation of the crusade’s origin reveals that from a Byzantine perspective the crusade was a practical conception, temporally inspired. This theme presents itself throughout *The Alexiad* as Komnene actively dismisses the Western claim that the crusade has religious motivation and authority.

Throughout *The Alexiad*, Komnene suggests that the true motive for the Frankish leaders going on crusade was to conquer the Byzantine Empire. Komnene writes that “...Bohemund and men of like mind, who had long cherished a desire for the Roman Empire...wished to win it for themselves, found a pretext in Peter’s preaching...deceived the more single-minded, caused this great upheaval and were selling their own estates under the pretense that they were marching against the Turks to redeem the Holy Sepulchre.”¹² For Komnene, the crusade’s primary goal was to conquer the Byzantine Empire.¹³ This assumption was not unfounded as in the years prior to the First Crusade there were numerous battles fought between the Western Normans and Eastern Byzantines over Byzantine territory. The Norman-Byzantine wars were in fact led in part by Bohemund of Antioch, a prominent First Crusade leader and his father.¹⁴ Komnene views the

¹⁰ The “People’s Crusade” was one of the first pilgrimage groups to make the journey to the Holy Land. The People’s Crusade was led by Peter the Hermit and consisted of those of the lower classes. The crusade never reached its final destination of Jerusalem with many dying or being captured before reaching the Holy City.

¹¹ Guibert of Nogent, in *The First Crusade: The Chronicle of Fulcher of Chartres and Other Source Materials*, Edward Peters, ed. 2nd ed. Philadelphia, 1998, p. 103.

¹² *The Alexiad*, p. 252.

¹³ Anna makes this claim repeatedly throughout the *Alexiad*. In addition to the previous quote she also writes, “...The other counts agreed to Bohemund’s plan, and in their dreams of capturing the capital had already come to the same decision ...that while in appearance making the journey to Jerusalem in reality their object was to dethrone the Emperor and to capture the capital” (*The Alexiad*, p. 258).

¹⁴ McQueen, William B. “Relations Between the Normans and Byzantium” 1071-1112.” *Byzantion* 56 (1986): 427–76.

First Crusade in a larger context as the continuation of the Latin West's plan to depose the emperor and destroy the empire. Despite her varying explanations for the crusade, her accounts closely mirror many of the Western sources. She views the crusade from an outsider point of view as she focuses her writing on how the crusade affected the reign of her father. The primary effect of the crusade being that the Byzantine Empire was now threatened by invaders on all sides—East and West. For Princess Anna, the crusade masked itself as a religious pilgrimage while harboring sinister motives. With the accessible information and based on the Franks' previous actions, it is understandable to see how Princess Anna came to such a conclusion.

It is generally agreed upon that Alexius I invited the Franks to the Byzantine Empire in hopes of using their military forces to his advantage to fend off the encroaching Turks. Many of the Western sources record that Pope Urban II initiated the First Crusade in part due to cries for help from the Byzantines. Interestingly, Komnene alludes in *The Alexiad* that Alexius was taken by surprise by the arrival of the Franks. Komnene writes: “[Alexius] heard a report of the approach of innumerable Frankish armies. Now he dreaded their arrival for he knew their irresistible manner of attack, their unstable and mobile character and all the peculiar natural and concomitant characteristics which the Frank retains throughout; and he also knew that they were always agape for money....”¹⁵ Komnene's lack of acknowledgement of Alexius's role in spearheading the crusade could be attributed to Anna's age at the time of the crusades.¹⁶ Her age at the time of the First Crusade would have impacted her understanding of the events as she most likely would not have had full awareness of Alexius' political maneuvering. Keeping in theme with the rest of *The Alexiad*, the omission of Alexius' role could also be Komnene's reluctance to acknowledge an alliance between the Eastern and Western churches.

¹⁵ *The Alexiad*, p. 248.

¹⁶ At the time of the initiation of the First Crusade, Anna would have only been around 13-14 years old.

The only mention of the pope in relation to his role in the crusade within this section of *The Alexiad* is seen when Komnene describes the pope's interaction with Bohemond of Antioch (1054-1111). Bohemond went to the pope some time after the beginning of the crusade to ask for support in securing the City of Antioch as an independent state rather than allowing Alexius to maintain control following the crusade's conclusion. The addition of this section is significant as it emphasizes that the pope sanctioned Bohemond to act directly against the authority of the Eastern Church. Emphasizing this point, Komnene writes, "For who among the barbarians... would not come of his own accord to a war against us when the high-priest gave his consent and an apparently just cause aroused every horse, man, and soldierly arm?"¹⁷ The mention of the pope reveals the Byzantine perspective of the Latin head of church as a direct political and military adversary. As the sole mention of the pope within the larger context of the crusade, Komnene leaves her readers with the impression that the pope poses a threat to Byzantine sovereignty.

A frequent insult that Princess Anna hurls at the Frankish race is their inclination towards greediness. Komnene uses Frankish greed throughout her account of the crusade to weave a common thread within the narrative. She writes, "...the Latin race is always very fond of money, but more especially when it is bent on raiding a country."¹⁸ In this short statement, she addresses two of the primary attributes of the Franks in *The Alexiad*: warmongering and greed. She uses these descriptions of the Franks to contrast with her description of the "civil" and "peaceful" Byzantine people. She particularly harps on the greed of Frankish leaders, showing more sympathy towards the common folk of the Frankish countries. She writes, "the simpler-minded were urged on by the real desire of worshipping at our Lord's Sepulchre... but the more astute,

¹⁷*The Alexiad*, p. 318.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

especially men like Bohemund and those of like mind, had another secret reason, namely, the hope that while on their travels they might by some means be able to seize the capital itself...”¹⁹ In this context, Komnene specifically correlates Frankish greed to their desire for the Byzantine capital. The Franks’ greed is a trait known to both their allies and enemies alike. Komnene claims that a Turkish leader tricked Frankish pilgrims into an ambush by sending messengers to a Frankish camp claiming that a parceling out of money would occur after the fall of Nicaea.²⁰ It is necessary that Komnene characterizes the Franks in this way as it emphasizes the threat that the Franks and their crusade pose to the Byzantine Empire.

The initial trial of the Byzantine-Frankish alliance came during the Siege of Nicaea in 1097. The accounts of the siege vary depending on the sources read. The primary difference between the Latin and Byzantine sources regards Emperor Alexius’s role in the siege. Both perspectives acknowledge that the siege was hard-fought and lasted into the night. Before sunset the Franks had the upper hand, but by nightfall the tides of luck had changed in favor of the defending Turks. After the initial Frankish attack, Alexius sent much-needed reinforcements and siege equipment to aid the Franks. After these events, the perspectives diverge. In *The Alexiad*, Princess Anna describes Alexius’ plan to successfully capture Nicaea and place it under Byzantine rule. She writes: “[Alexius]...aimed at capturing Nicaea himself, if the occasion seemed propitious, and not receiving it from the Franks in accordance with their pledged word. He kept this plan to himself ...he sent [Butumites] to win over the barbarians inside, partly promising them complete immunity besides many other things...”²¹ In accordance with the deal Alexius made with the Turkish leaders, the Turks secretly surrendered the City of Nicaea to the emperor. According to Princess Anna, Alexius still encouraged the Franks to siege the city that

¹⁹ *The Alexiad*, p. 250.

²⁰ Anna writes, “Besides this, as he [the sultan] knew the Franks’ love of money...” (*The Alexiad*, p. 251).

²¹ *The Alexiad*, p. 268.

way the Franks would believe that their military might won the city and not by his deception. Historians highly value Princess Anna's account as it adds an unique perspective and explanation of the occurrences at Nicaea.²² From the princess' view, Alexius's plan benefited the Franks as he prevented their complete slaughter with his understanding of the city's strength and defenses. Komnene emphasizes how Alexius truly wished to comply with Frankish plans but decided instead to form his own secret deal in order to ensure the safety of his people. Western sources do not share this sentiment.

The Western sources either do not mention Alexius's double-crossing, or, if they do, recognize Alexius's betrayal and paint a decidedly negative image of the emperor. Fulcher of Chartres, a cleric who later became chaplain for King Baldwin I of Jerusalem, positively praises Alexius for his contribution of reinforcements and weapons only adding one sentence that alludes to the scheming involved in the surrender of Nicaea.²³ The *Gesta*, written by an anonymous author, similarly describes the events of the siege. In addition to acknowledging Alexius's role in reenforcing the Frankish army, the author seems to misconstrue the true nature of the city's surrender. The *Gesta's* author seems to believe that the Turks contacted the emperor first with the terms of their surrender and not vice-versa.²⁴ The *Gesta's* author, however, does chastise the emperor for accepting the Turkish offer and allowing the surviving Turks to walk free relatively unharmed. The version of events according to Raymond d'Aguilers, a chaplain for Raymond of St. Giles, a prominent First Crusade leader, presents the most comparable version of events with Princess Anna's *Alexiad* version. D'Aguilers outright declares the emperor a traitor for personally accepting the Turkish surrender.²⁵ Despite the inconsistencies found within the

²² France, J. "Anna Comneno, The Alexiad and the First Crusade," *Reading Medieval Studies* 10, (1984): 20-38, p. 26.

²³ Fulcher of Chartres, in *The First Crusade*, p. 64.

²⁴ Anonymous writer of the *Gesta*, in *ibid.*, p. 182.

²⁵ Raymond d'Aguilers, in *ibid.*, p. 184.

sources of the Siege of Nicaea, all the sources address the strained relationship between the East and West.

Anna Komnene presents the Siege of Antioch (1097-1098) as the next most consequential siege in the First Crusade. Komnene pays special attention to this siege as it resulted in Bohemund of Taranto becoming the Prince of Antioch. Both Latin and Byzantine sources focus on the plan Bohemund concocted in order to secure the city for himself. While both Eastern and Western sources discuss Bohemund's scheme to ensure his possession of the city after its siege, they present his plan in dramatically different lights. According to Western sources, Bohemund befriended the Armenian-Muslim leader of the city, Pirus, promising him wealth and honors if he handed the city over to Bohemund secretly. After finalizing the deal, Bohemund then went to the other Frankish leaders to propose a competition that whichever one of them first captures the city will gain possession of it. Because of his deal with Pirus, Bohemund was assured of his victory. In the *Gesta* version of events, the counts originally refuse Bohemund's plan, but after hearing of a large approaching Muslim force they concede. Interestingly, in this version, the leaders only agree to cede the city to Bohemund if emperor Alexius fails to come to the aid of the Franks at Antioch. The *Gesta's* author writes, "let us give it to him freely with one accord, on condition that if the emperor comes to our aid and wishes to carry out every agreement, as he swore and promised, we will return it to him by right. But if he does not do this, let Bohemund keep it in his power."²⁶ In this version, the plan is only agreed upon out of necessity and fear of the nearing Muslim army with the Frankish leaders acknowledging that the city rightfully belongs to Alexius due to oaths the Franks swore before Alexius in Constantinople.²⁷ In contrast to the *Gesta*, Fulcher's version presents the arrangement

²⁶ Anonymous writer of the *Gesta*, in *The First Crusade*, p. 203.

²⁷ After first arriving in Constantinople the Frankish crusade leaders swore oaths to Emperor Alexius that any of the cities they captured would become vassals of the Byzantine Empire.

between Bohemund and Pirus as a larger mutual agreement between the Frankish leaders and Bohemund. Fulcher provides little detail of this deal, but stresses the crucial fact that Antioch would have been nearly impossible to siege due to its fortifications. For this reason, the military leaders favored strategic agreement. All Western sources emphasize the suffering of the Franks due to a lack of supplies and their subsequent starvation during the nine month siege. For these reasons, the authors of the Western sources present the deal between Bohemund, the Frankish leaders, and Pirus as an agreement of self-preservation.

Anna Komnene's version of the Siege of Antioch primarily concentrates on Bohemund's plan to control the city and Alexius' perspective of the siege. Anna presents Bohemund's plan with Pirus as directly in violation of Bohemund's oath to the emperor. Her version of Bohemund's plan aligns with many of the Western sources where Bohemund proposed a competition for the city's governance.²⁸ Her emphasis in this section focuses on the direct betrayal to the emperor and Byzantine rule inherent in Bohemund's plan. She calls his scheme a "wicked plan,"²⁹ characterizing Bohemund as a decidedly conniving person. She continues this characterization writing, "Bohemund plied [Pirus] with honeyed words, tempted him with many promises and thus persuaded him to betray the city to him."³⁰ Once again, the inclusion of Bohemund's plan supports Komnene's theme of Frankish greed. Following the description of how Bohemund came into possession of the city, she shifts her focus to Alexius and his role—or lack thereof—in the siege. The primary value of Komnene's account of the Siege of Antioch is that it reveals Alexius's reasoning as to why he failed to send aid to the sieging Franks. Her account paints Alexius sympathetically as she emphasizes his distress at not being able to come

²⁸ *The Alexiad*, p. 278.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

to the Franks' assistance.³¹ She justifies Alexius's absence from Antioch writing, "by hastening to the assistance of Antioch he might cause the destruction of Constantinople."³² Similarly to the Western sources, Alexius understands the challenge that Antioch poses militarily with its considerable defenses and strategic location. Komnene, when writing of the Siege of Antioch, primarily concerns herself with the defense of her father's decision to not help the Franks. By using accounts from *The Alexiad*, one's understanding of the Siege of Antioch becomes more well-rounded through the understanding of Emperor Alexius's reasoning for failing to aid the Franks.

The most important siege to the Franks only lasted a month and ended in July 1099. The Siege of Jerusalem, while notably short, represented the culmination of a years-long journey. While the Western sources spend significant time analyzing and detailing the siege, *The Alexiad* dedicates only two lines to the entire event. Komnene writes of the siege: "...They encircled [Jerusalem's] walls and made frequent attacks on them and besieged the town and within one lunar month they took it and killed many of the Saracenic and Jewish inhabitants. When they had brought all into subjection and no one resisted them, they invested Godfrey with supreme authority by unanimous consent and called him 'king'."³³ One possible reason for the curt description of the siege could be because the siege did not involve the Byzantines and as such had no narrative value as evidence of Alexius's triumphs. Another possible reason could be that Jerusalem marked the culmination of the crusade for the Franks while for the Byzantines the capture of Jerusalem had no effect on the overarching threat that both the Muslims and Franks posed by their presence in Byzantine territory. An interesting aspect of Komnene's writing is that she emphasizes that the Franks crowned Godfrey "king". One reason for this emphasis of "king"

³¹ *The Alexiad*, p. 283.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 285-286.

could be Komnene once again subtly alluding that she does not believe that the Franks had rightful ownership over the cities that they conquered and that they instead belonged to Alexius. Despite being the most significant siege in Western sources, the Siege of Jerusalem plays little role in *The Alexiad*.

One of the most important figures found within both the Western and Byzantine sources is Bohemund of Antioch. His role in *The Alexiad* is especially unique as he simultaneously represents the numerous flaws and the few virtues that the Franks possess as Anna sees them. Throughout *The Alexiad* he is also compared and contrasted against Alexius's "Byzantine qualities". Anna views Bohemund as the most prominent and successful Frankish military leader in the crusades and as such she uses him throughout *The Alexiad* to represent the entirety of the Frankish race. Komnene uses the word "wicked" repeatedly to describe Bohemund and his actions.³⁴ In this way, Komnene makes the association for her reader between Bohemund and the Franks with wickedness and immorality. Before describing a meeting between Alexius and Bohemund, Komnene makes the point to analyze both the physical and mental qualities of Bohemund. She writes of Bohemund, "this man who was of such a size and such a character was inferior to the emperor alone in fortune and eloquence and in other gifts of nature."³⁵ In this section, Anna makes the direct contrast between Bohemund as the leader of the Franks to Alexius, leader of the Byzantines. While Bohemund's baseness is the main quality emphasized, Anna acknowledges his shrewdness when she describes an event only found within *The Alexiad*. Anna describes an event around the year 1100. Anna claims that after leaving the City of Antioch in the hands of his nephew Tancred, Bohemund faked his death by hiding in a coffin with rotting animal corpses for days on end while his companions smuggled his coffin to the Island of

³⁴ *The Alexiad*, p. 294, 278.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

Corfu.³⁶ As this story has no equivalent in the Western sources, it seems as though Anna has included this tale solely for the purpose of embellishing her narrative. She uses the story to once again emphasize the barbarity of the Franks and lengths to which they will go to destroy the Byzantines. She writes, “the deviance of the barbarian was unique in the world of our time, and was directed at the downfall of the Roman hegemony.”³⁷ This story highlights Anna’s more dramatic writing style sacrificing accuracy for thematic consistency. Using Bohemund as the embodiment of all Frankish flaws and strength, allows Anna to critique the Franks race with the inclusion of stories such as Bohemund’s attempt to fake his death.

After the Siege of Jerusalem, Princess Anna's focus in terms of Eastern relations with the West focuses on Bohemond. She is less preoccupied with the Frankish sieges of other Turkish cities following Jerusalem. For the princess, the more imminent threat lies in Bohemund and his desire for the Byzantine Empire as opposed to the threat that the Turks pose. While the culmination of the First Crusade is usually referred to as the Siege of Tyre in 1124, Anna’s crusade narrative roughly ends with the Treaty of Devol in 1108. Following the treaty, she moves quickly through the defeat of the Turks to the death of her father. The Treaty of Devol aimed to end the battle of sovereignty between Alexius and Bohemund over various holdings including Antioch. The treaty is heavily skewed in Alexius’s favor with Bohemund becoming the emperor’s vassal.³⁸ For Anna, the treaty signifies the end of Frankish invasion of Byzantine land. It is a monumental treaty for the security of the empire and as such she dedicates significant time to describing its terms. Anna uses her account of the oath to reinforce the authority of the Eastern Orthodox Church with Bohemond, a Western Christian, swearing to recognize the authority of a

³⁶ *The Alexiad*, p. 297-299.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 289

³⁸ *The Alexiad*, p. 350.

Byzantine Patriarch.³⁹ This is particularly significant to Anna as she viewed the First Crusade within the context of a struggle between the authority of the Eastern and Western church.⁴⁰ Throughout the oath, Alexius refers to himself and his son John as “Emperors of the Roman Hegemony”⁴¹ further supporting Komnene’s claim of the legitimacy and authority of the Empire. She presents the oath as a barbarian coming to his senses and showing remorse for his behaviors. The treaty is the culmination of the First Crusade in the eyes of Anna and the Byzantines as in her version it ended with the triumph of the Eastern Church and empire.

As the only substantial and comprehensive Byzantine account of the First Crusade, Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad* provides invaluable accounts to the known collection of First Crusade sources. Penned by a female historian, the work becomes even more extraordinary. Sources written by male historians dominate the vast majority of First Crusade records, but with *The Alexiad* comes a new perspective from an underrepresented minority. Through comparing *The Alexiad* to the well-known Western sources, one can acquire a more complete understanding of the complex inner-workings of the crusade. *The Alexiad* adds a depth of detail not found in other crusade sources as the author Princess Anna had firsthand knowledge of the events. Princess Anna firmly establishes by the end of her work her belief that the crusade was undoubtedly a political endeavor of the Franks. Throughout the work, she almost entirely neglects its religious significance to the Western Christians. Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad* has the potential to change the popular understanding of the First Crusade, revealing that the First Crusade cannot be easily characterized as an united Christian front against the Muslim armies. Princess Anna’s unique perspective within *The Alexiad* tells of the complexities of the relationships between the two Christian armies in their struggle for political and religious dominance.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 354.

⁴⁰ Nicholson, Helen. *Women and the Crusades*, p. 225.

⁴¹ *The Alexiad*, p. 350, 353.

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