

Anna Comnena, Alexiad, X,  
translated by E. R. A Sewter  
(Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969),  
324-31.

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, a numberless heterogeneous host gathered together from almost all the Keltic lands with their leaders (kings and dukes and counts and even bishops). The emperor sent envoys to greet them as a mark of friendship and forwarded politic letters. It was typical of Alexius: he had an uncanny prevision and knew how to seize a point of vantage before his rivals. Officers appointed for this particular task were ordered to provide victuals on the journey – the pilgrims must have no excuse for complaint for any reason whatever. Meanwhile they were eagerly pressing on to the capital. One might have compared them for number to the stars of heaven or the grains of sand poured out over the shore; as they hurried towards Constantinople they were indeed 'numerous as the leaves and flowers of spring'<sup>51</sup> (to quote Homer). For all my desire to name their leaders, I prefer

50. Or 'on their way to' (the Greek is ambiguous).  
51. *Iliad* ii, 468; *Odyssey* ix, 51.

## BOOK TEN

not to do so. The words fail me, partly through my inability to make the barbaric sounds – they are so unpronounceable – and partly because I recoil before their great numbers. In any case, why should I try to list the names of so enormous a multitude, when even their contemporaries became indifferent at the sight of them? When they did finally arrive in the capital, on the emperor's orders they established their troops near the monastery of Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian, reaching as far as the Hieron. It was not nine heralds, after the old Greek custom, who 'restrained them with cries', but a considerable number of soldiers who accompanied them and persuaded them to obey the emperor's commands. With the idea of enforcing the same oath that Godfrey had taken, Alexius invited them to visit him separately. He talked with them in private about his wishes and used the more reasonable among them as intermediaries to coerce the reluctant. When they rejected advice – they were anxiously waiting for Bohemond to come – and found ingenious methods of evasion by making new demands, he refuted their objections with no difficulty at all and harried them in a hundred ways until they were driven to take the oath. Godfrey himself was invited to cross over from Pelekanum to watch the ceremony. When all, including Godfrey, were assembled and after the oath had been sworn by every count, one nobleman dared to seat himself on the emperor's throne. Alexius endured this without a word, knowing of old the haughty temper of the Latins, but Count Baldwin went up to the man, took him by the hand and made him rise. He gave him a severe reprimand: 'You ought never to have done such a thing, especially after promising to be the emperor's liege-man. Roman emperors don't let their subjects sit with them. That's the custom here and sworn liege-men of His Majesty should observe the customs of the country.' The man said nothing to Baldwin, but with a bitter glance at Alexius muttered some words to himself in his own language: 'What a peasant! He sits alone while generals like these stand beside him!' Alexius saw his lips moving and calling one of the interpreters who understood the language asked what he had said. Being told the words he made no comment to the man at

the time, but kept the remark to himself. However, when they were all taking their leave of him, he sent for the arrogant, impudent fellow and asked who he was, where he came from and what his lineage was. 'I am a pure Frank,' he replied, 'and of noble birth. One thing I know: at a cross-roads in the country where I was born is an ancient shrine;<sup>52</sup> to this anyone who wishes to engage in single combat goes, prepared to fight; there he prays to God for help and there he stays awaiting the man who will dare to answer his challenge. At that cross-roads I myself have spent time, waiting and longing for the man who would fight – but there was never one who dared.' Hearing this the emperor said, 'If you didn't get your fight then, when you looked for it, now you have a fine opportunity for many. But I strongly recommend you not to take up position in the rear of the army, nor in the van; stand in the centre with the *hemilochitae*.<sup>53</sup> I know the enemy's methods. I've had long experience of the Turk.' The advice was not given to him alone, but as they left he warned all the others of the manifold dangers they were likely to meet on the journey. He advised them not to pursue the enemy too far, if God gave them the victory, lest falling into traps set by the Turkish leaders they should be massacred.

So much for Godfrey, Raoul and those who came with them. Bohemond arrived at Apros with the other counts. Knowing that he himself was not of noble descent, with no great military following because of his lack of resources, he wished to win the emperor's goodwill, but at the same time to conceal his own hostile intentions against him. With only ten Kelts he hurried to reach the capital before the rest. Alexius understood his schemes – he had long experience of Bohemond's deceitful, treacherous nature – and desired to talk with him before his companions arrived; he wanted to hear what Bohemond had to say and while he still had no chance of corrupting the rest (they were not far away now) he hoped to persuade him to cross over to Asia. When Bohemond came into his presence, Alexius at once gave him a smile and

52. It is probable that the sanctuary was at Soissons.

53. Junior officers in the army.

inquired about his journey. Where had he left the counts? Bohemond replied frankly and to the best of his knowledge to all these questions, while the emperor politely reminded him of his daring deeds at Larissa and Dyrrachium; he also recalled Bohemond's former hostility. 'I was indeed an enemy and foe then,' said Bohemond, 'but now I come of my own free will as Your Majesty's friend.' Alexius talked at length with him, in a somewhat discreet way trying to discover the man's real feelings, and when he concluded that Bohemond would be prepared to take the oath of allegiance, he said to him, 'You are tired now from your journey. Go away and rest. Tomorrow we can discuss matters of common interest.' Bohemond went off to the Cosmidion, where an apartment had been made ready for him and a rich table was laid full of delicacies and food of all kinds. Later the cooks brought in meat and flesh of animals and birds, uncooked. 'The food, as you see, has been prepared by us in our customary way,' they said, 'but if that does not suit you here is raw meat which can be cooked in whatever way you like.' In doing and saying this they were carrying out the emperor's instructions. Alexius was a shrewd judge of a man's character, cleverly reading the innermost thoughts of his heart, and knowing the spiteful, malevolent nature of Bohemond, he rightly guessed what would happen. It was in order that Bohemond might have no suspicions that he caused the uncooked meat to be set before him at the same time, and it was an excellent move. The cunning Frank not only refused to taste any of the food, but would not even touch it with his finger-tips; he rejected it outright, but divided it all up among the attendants, without a hint of his own secret misgivings. It looked as if he was doing them a favour, but that was mere pretence: in reality, if one considers the matter rightly, he was mixing them a cup of death. There was no attempt to hide his treachery, for it was his habit to treat servants with utter indifference. However, he told his own cooks to prepare the raw meat in the usual Frankish way. On the next day he asked the attendants how they felt. 'Very well,' they replied and added that they had suffered not the slightest harm from it. At these words he revealed his hidden

fear: 'For my own part,' he said, 'when I remembered the wars I have fought with him, not to mention the famous battle, I was afraid he might arrange to kill me by putting a dose of poison in the food.' Such were the actions of Bohemond. I must say I have never seen an evil man who in all his deeds and words did not depart far from the path of right; whenever a man leaves the middle course, to whatever extreme he inclines he takes his stand far from virtue. Bohemond was summoned then and required, like the others, to take the customary Latin oath. Knowing what his position was he acquiesced gladly enough, for he had neither illustrious ancestors nor great wealth (hence his forces were not strong – only a moderate number of Keltic followers). In any case Bohemond was by nature a liar. After the ceremony was over, Alexius set aside a room in the palace precincts and had the floor covered with all kinds of wealth: clothes, gold and silver coins, objects of lesser value filled the place so completely that it was impossible for anyone to walk in it. He ordered the man deputed to show Bohemond these riches to open the doors suddenly. Bohemond was amazed at the sight. 'If I had had such wealth,' he said, 'I would long ago have become master of many lands.' 'All this,' said the man, 'is yours today – a present from the emperor.' Bohemond was overjoyed. After accepting the gift and thanking him for it, he went off to rest at his lodging-place. Yet when the things were brought to him, although he had expressed such admiration before, he changed. 'I never thought I should be so insulted by the emperor,' he said. 'Take them away. Give them back to the sender.' Alexius, familiar with the Latins' characteristic moodiness, quoted a popular saying: 'His mischief shall return upon his own head.' Bohemond heard about this, and when he saw the servants carefully assembling the presents to carry them away, he changed his mind once more; instead of sending them off in anger he smiled on them, like a sea-polypus which transforms itself in a minute. The truth is that Bohemond was an habitual rogue, quick to react to fleeting circumstance; he far surpassed all the Latins who passed through Constantinople at that time in rascality and courage, but he

was equally inferior in wealth and resources. He was the supreme mischief-maker. As for inconstancy, that followed automatically – a trait common to all Latins. It was no surprise then that he should be overjoyed to receive the money he had formerly refused. When he left his native land, he was a soured man, for he had no estates at all. Apparently he left to worship at the Holy Sepulchre, but in reality to win power for himself – or rather, if possible, to seize the Roman Empire itself, as his father had suggested. He was prepared to go to any length, as they say, but a great deal of money was required. The emperor, aware of the man's disagreeable, ill-natured disposition, cleverly sought to remove everything that contributed to Bohemond's secret plans. When therefore Bohemond demanded the office of Domestic of the East, he was not granted his request; he could not 'out-Cretan the Cretan',<sup>54</sup> for Alexius was afraid that once possessed of authority he might use it to subjugate all the other counts and thereafter convert them easily to any policy he chose. At the same time, because he did not wish Bohemond to suspect in any way that his plans were already detected, he flattered him with fine hopes. 'The time for that is not yet ripe, but with your energy and loyalty it will not be long before you have even that honour.' After a conversation with the Franks and after showing his friendship for them with all kinds of presents and honours, on the next day he took his seat on the imperial throne. Bohemond and the others were sent for and warned about the things likely to happen on their journey. He gave them profitable advice. They were instructed in the methods normally used by the Turks in battle; told how they should draw up a battle-line, how to lay ambushes; advised not to pursue far when the enemy ran away in flight. In this way, by means of money and good advice, he did much to soften their ferocious nature. Then he proposed that they should cross the straits. For one of them, Raymond the Count of Saint-Gilles,<sup>55</sup>

54. As we say, 'out-Herod Herod'.

55. Anna calls him Isangeles. He was Count of Toulouse and Marquis of Provence, hoped to lead the Crusaders in the field and was a rival of Bohemond.

Alexius had a deep affection, for several reasons: the count's superior intellect, his untarnished reputation, the purity of his life. He knew moreover how greatly Raymond valued the truth: whatever the circumstances, he honoured truth above all else. In fact, Saint-Gilles outshone all Latins in every quality, as the sun is brighter than the stars. It was for this that Alexius detained him for some time. Thus, when all the others had taken their leave of him and made the journey across the straits of the Propontis to Damalio,<sup>56</sup> and when he was now relieved of their troublesome presence, he sent for him on many occasions. He explained in more detail the adventures that the Latins must expect to meet with on their march; he also laid bare his own suspicions of their plans. In the course of many conversations on this subject he unreservedly opened the doors of his soul, as it were, to the count; he warned him always to be on his guard against Bohemond's perfidy, so that if attempts were made to break the treaty he might frustrate them and in every way thwart Bohemond's schemes. Saint-Gilles pointed out that Bohemond inherited perjury and guile from his ancestors – it was a kind of heirloom. 'It will be a miracle if he keeps his sworn word,' he said. 'As far as I am concerned, however, I will always try to the best of my ability to observe your commands.' With that he took his leave of the emperor and went off to join the whole Celtic army.<sup>57</sup> Alexius would have liked to share in the expedition against the barbarians, too, but he feared the enormous numbers of the Kelts. He did think it wise, though, to move to Pelekanum. Making his permanent headquarters near Nicaea, he could obtain information about their progress and at the same time about Turkish activities outside the city, as well as about the condition of the inhabitants inside. It would be shameful, he believed, if in the meantime he did not himself win some military success. When a favourable opportunity arose, he planned to capture Nicaea himself; that would be preferable to receiving it from the Kelts (according to the agreement already made with them). Nevertheless he kept the idea to himself. Whatever dispositions he made, and the

56. In April 1097.

57. In May 1097.

reasons for them, were known to himself alone, although he did entrust this task to Boutoumites (his sole confidant). Boutoumites was instructed to suborn the barbarians in Nicaea by all kinds of guarantees and the promise of a complete amnesty, but also by holding over them the prospect of this or that retribution – even massacre – if the Kelts took the city. He had long been assured of Boutoumites' loyalty and he knew that in such matters he would take energetic measures. The history of the foregoing events has been set out in chronological order from the beginning.

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