

The Political Opposition to Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118)

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Note on translation and transliteration

In this thesis, I used both editions of sources and, when available, their translations to modern languages. Direct citations from sources were translated by me, unless indicated otherwise. In case of paraphrases of whole passages, I made the choice of using both editions and translations, indicating the position in the text by using the most traditional reference forms for each work, which are consistently used both in recent editions and translations. For example, although in this work the edition of Michael Attaleiates' *History* by Inmaculada Pérez Martín was consulted, I made the decision of using the number of pages of the Bonn edition, which are indicated both in the Pérez Martín's edition and in the translation by Anthony Kaldellis and Dimitri Krallis so that the reader can easily find the passages to which I am referring both in modern editions and in the translations.

Names of Byzantine individuals or of foreigners integrated into Byzantine society and therefore, with Greek versions of their names were transliterated from their Greek original. In the few cases in which foreigners, i.e. non-Byzantines, not integrated in Byzantine society are mentioned, I preferred to use the English version of their names (Henry IV, not Heinrich IV; Roussel de Bailleul, not Ourselios). Names of locations, cities and regions are also translated into English.

Despite being fully aware of the current debate about the Romaness of the Byzantine society and of the artificiality of the label "Byzantine", I made the conscious choice of using it to describe Eastern Roman individuals and Eastern Roman things for clarity reasons.

i. Introduction

The historian who decides to devote himself to the reign of Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) does not lack sources. His long and eventful reign ensured the existence of many accounts from within and without Byzantium. These characteristics also resulted in a great number of works concerning different aspects of his reign.¹ It could be possibly argued that the sources on Alexios' time and reign have been investigated too often. However, as Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable state in their *People and Power in Byzantium*, modern Byzantine scholars face the dilemma of “whether to follow the safe path of collecting individual sources and isolated facts or whether to aim in spite the risks of errors in facts and interpretation, at the goal of understanding both how Byzantine society worked and how this understanding can help in appreciating the modern world”². They inquire further, “is the main task, in other words, to enrich our minds with new facts or to approach, with the support of the facts already known, a new insight into Byzantine society and culture? In order to reach new shores, is our primary need new sources or new perspectives?”³ Although this statement dates from 1982, it is still relevant. A field can become vitiated by long-established concepts, ingrained for so long that they are hardly questioned. This is an insightful thought given that Political History was criticized in the 20th century for being positivist and a justification for nationalist discourses. Thus, historians were encouraged to work with other subjects such as Culture in a wider sense, Economy, and Society. Nonetheless, politics has been reassessed by recent scholarship. Approaches from Social and Cultural History, as well as Political Sciences and Anthropology gave rise to new studies dedicated not so much to the History of States, but rather to power and how it was understood, exercised, represented and contested.⁴

The present thesis identifies with that approach. Although Byzantine chronicles and histories organize their economy of events around the sequence of reigning emperors, they present the rulers as continuously negotiating with various social and institutional forces, contradicting the image of an almighty emperor, elected by God, against whom it was sinful to rebel. Accordingly, the emperor shall not be

¹ About the availability of sources during the reign of Alexios I, see Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. iii–xl; Karayannopoulos/Weiss, *Quellenkunde*, II, pp. 409–458; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 5–18.

² Kazhdan/Constable, *People and Power*, p. xii.

³ Kazhdan/Constable, *People and Power*, p. 2.

⁴ Mann, *Sources*, *passim*; Nieto Soria, *Sobre la transformación*, pp. 509–524; Weichlein, *Politische Geschichte*, in: Jordan, *Lexikon Geschichtswissenschaft*, pp. 238–241.

acknowledged as a lofty figure that hovered over political disputes but rather as one of the players in the political game; a privileged one to be sure, who had access to resources nobody else had. Therefore, he could not escape from necessary negotiation and from facing competition. This can be observed in every moment of Byzantine History, in varying combinations depending on internal and external conditions.⁵ The reign of Alexios I Komnenos was a good example. He appears in the sources, if properly examined, as a ruler who, firstly, was in a fragile position throughout a significant part of his reign and, secondly, had to negotiate with the opposition. Hence, this thesis intends to present an extensive study of the opposition to the emperor Alexios.

i.i. Bibliographic Review

It is possible to pinpoint the beginning of the discussion about the opposition to Alexios in the monograph on his reign by Ferdinand Chalandon. Since his work was more concerned with the order of the events, Chalandon does not put much effort into analyzing the oppositional movements against Alexios I.⁶ George Ostrogorsky has made one of the first and still influent efforts to systematize the opposition to Alexios I. He interprets the political struggles of the 11th century as the result of a dual division within the aristocracy. According to him, “the Byzantine history of the following decades [my note: here he means, after the death of Basileios II in 1025] that at first sight seems simply as a tangle of court intrigues, was defined by competing forces of the civil aristocracy of the capital and the military nobility of the province.”⁷

Armin Hohlweg also provides one of the earliest and still influential insights into the Komnenian rule. In his *Beiträge zur Verwaltungsgeschichte des oströmischen Reiches unter den Komnenen*, Hohlweg presents an extensive study on the Byzantine administration and the structure of the Komnenian ruling elite based on blood relations and marriage alliances, which is described as a sort of power sharing. Hohlweg argues that the Komnenian regime was a consensus reached within aristocracy as to finally control the state. This author presents a positive image of the Komnenian rule by stating

⁵ Angelov, *Power and Subversion*, pp. 2–18; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 475; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 9–121. On this subject, pp. 11–13.

⁶ Chalandon, *Essai*, *passim*.

⁷ Ostrogorsky, *Geschichte*, p. 265. Further on (pp. 290–331), Ostrogorsky states that the accession of Alexios Komnenos to power was a confirmation of the victory of the military nobility. This author confirmed his views later on, see Ostrogorsky, *Observations*, pp. 1–32.

that it had put a halt to the political decline of the Byzantine state observed in the previous years.⁸

Another important contribution to the debate on the meaning of the power struggles during the reign of Alexios I is *Des Kaisers Macht und Ohnmacht. Zum Zerfall der Zentralgewalt in Byzanz vor dem vierten Kreuzzug* by Ralph-Johannes Lilie, who delves into the cause of the disintegration of state authority at the end of the 12th and the beginning of the 13th centuries. According to the author, Alexios' regime created a consensus between the central government and provincial forces, grounded on the concession or acknowledgement of the autonomy and influence of local elites by the emperor. In exchange, these elites supported him politically or, at least, did not contest his grip on the central authority.⁹

In a seminal work on the Byzantine aristocracy translated into Italian in a partnership with Silvia Ronchey, Alexander Kazhdan confirms Ostrogorsky's views, classifying the Byzantine aristocratic lineages into the labels "military", "civil" and "metamorphic". In the latter, Kazhdan and Ronchey listed the families with a balanced presence both in the armed forces and in the bureaucracy.¹⁰ In a review of Kazhdan's and Ronchey's book, Jean-Claude Cheynet denies the essential division in the aristocracy between military and civil. The strong presence of particular lineages within branches of the state apparatus is assessed by Cheynet as strategy in face of the political situation of their time.¹¹ In an article published in 2009, John Haldon says that the aristocracy in the middle-Byzantine period was fragmented in several fluid cliques, whose formation depended not only on their position in the imperial apparatus but also on their geographical origins, marriage connections, and short-range political ambitions.¹² Although discarded as an explanatory model, the understanding that antagonism between civil and military aristocracy determined the political struggles in the 11th century Byzantium retained its influence in assessments of the political opposition to Alexios I Komnenos.¹³

⁸ Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, passim.

⁹ Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 32–56.

¹⁰ Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia*, passim. Later, Kazhdan relativizes his position about this issue, Kazhdan/ Epstein, *Change*, pp. 62–68.

¹¹ Cheynet, *Aristocracy and Inheritance*, pp. 1–28.

¹² Haldon, *Social Elites*, p. 185.

¹³ Leib, *Les silences*, pp. 1–11; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 27–28, 32–47; Haldon, *Social Elite*, p. 192; Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 188.

With his *Pouvoir et Contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Jean-Claude Cheynet presents another explanatory model, according to which the Byzantine aristocracy is grouped according to the geographic origins of their lineage.¹⁴ Cheynet states that Alexios succeeded in his efforts to recruit the “Phrygian” and “Macedonian” parties, whilst the “Cappadocians” were left out, attributing the most serious plots against Alexios – the conspiracies of Nikephoros Diogenes (1094) and Anemas (around 1100) – to the dissatisfactions of this group.¹⁵ They were supposedly disappointed with Alexios I’s hesitation to retake the Anatolian lands lost to the Turks.¹⁶ Although Cheynet’s assessment is valuable and many of his arguments are compelling, his long term global and geographic view of the political struggles in Byzantium and his approach of assessing the aristocratic lineages as acting in blocks, hardly considering internal divisions, overlooks important aspects of the opposition to Alexios I.

Peter Frankopan’s work on Alexios’ reign also represents an important contribution to the study of this subject. Frankopan conducts interesting case studies in which the deficiencies found in Cheynet’s assessments are convincingly addressed. Moreover, he questions the role of the imperial family as Alexios’ source of support and puts forward hypotheses about the participation of some of his relatives in conspiracies against him.¹⁷ In his articles, Frankopan does not dwell particularly on the causes of the oppositional movements, but he addresses questions concerning the chronology of events, taking into consideration the problematic nature of the foremost source for political events during Alexios I’s reign, the *Alexiad* by Anna Komnene, and the personal agency of some important political actors. At this particular point, Frankopan touches on a crucial issue: the role of Alexios’ relatives in the political opposition to him. For a long time, his family government was considered the bedrock of his regime, so that the fractioning of this group is considered a later development.¹⁸ However, Frankopan’s articles present the Komnenian consortium as an ensemble composed of different groups and interests, which were often in conflict with one another and with

¹⁴ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 337, 476–478.

¹⁵ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 370–372.

¹⁶ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 367–369; Cheynet, *Se révolter*, p. 65.

¹⁷ Frankopan, *The Imperial Governors of Dyrrakhion*, pp. 65–103; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Revolts on Crete and Cyprus*, pp. 382–402; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. The Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes*, pp. 257–274; Frankopan, *Unravelling the Alexiad*, pp. 147–166; Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 1–34; Frankopan, *Where Advice*, pp. 71–88; Frankopan, *The Fall of Nicaea*, pp. 153–184; Frankopan, *Re-interpreting*, pp. 181–196.

¹⁸ Magdalino mentions the fractioning in the Komnenian group at the beginning in the reign of Ioannes II Komnenos, see Magdalino, *The Empire*, pp. 217–227.

the emperor himself. He makes nuanced presentations of individuals such as Adrianos Komnenos and Nikephoros Melissenos, who were an integral part of the Komnenian group, but at the same time sources of instability inside this same group. Though Frankopan's contributions to the research on the opposition to Alexios I present a wide range of convincing insights, it is possible to question and expand some of his proposals and approaches.¹⁹

i.ii Conceptual and Theoretical Issues on Political Opposition in Byzantium

Opposition Studies is a field within Political Sciences, but most of its approaches are dedicated to modern contexts, such as liberal democracies or authoritarian dictatorships.²⁰ Since studies on pre-modern societies are not very numerous, it is necessary to adapt concepts and explanatory models created for other societies in order to establish a suitable analytical model for Byzantium.

In his introduction to the book *Regimes and Oppositions*, Robert Dahl classifies regimes according to how openly they respond to oppositional expressions. At the one extreme, there is a "pure hegemonic regime" that responds to one person or a very small group of individuals. At the other extreme, the "egalitarian democracy" gives every individual the same level of political participation. Dahl affirms that both extremes are merely hypothetical and real societies are normally located somewhere between these zones.²¹ Dahl claims that institutional opposition is not tolerated in hegemonic systems, even in ones that are more open. Yet it does not mean that opposition does not exist in hegemonic regimes.²² It can be limited to a small group of powerful people who fight secretly to attain the favor of the dictator or to escape his wrath. This opposition might also intend to change the members of the ruling group or its policy. Dahl defines two kinds of opposition in hegemonic systems: the "factional and interest-based opposition

¹⁹ Studies on the ecclesiastical opposition to Alexios I by Victoria Casamiquela Gerhold are also inspired by Frankopan's insights and thus present convincing observations on the political struggles during his reign, which shall be discussed in the following chapters, see Gerhold, *Le "mouvement chalcédonien"*, pp. 87–104; Gerhold, *Église et aristocratie laïque*, pp. 55–125.

²⁰ One seminal work on Political Opposition was "Regime and Opposition" edited by Robert Dahl, whose introduction shall provide some basic concepts for this dissertation, see Dahl, Introduction, pp. 1–18. Other introductory and comprehensive contributions are made by Giampaolo Zuchini in Norberto Bobbio's *Lexicon of Political Ideas* and Nathalie Brack's and Sharon Weinblum's article on different approaches to political opposition, see Brack/ Weinblum, *Political Opposition*, pp. 69–79; Zuchini, Giampaolo, Art. "Oposição", in: Bobbio/ Matteucci/ Pasquino(ed.), *Dicionário de Política*, pp. 846–850. Although scholarly assessment of opposition in pre-modern societies is underrepresented, some works resulting from conferences can be mentioned, see Depreux, Introduction, pp. 9–17; Kintzinger/ Rexroth/ Rogge (ed.): *Gewalt und Widerstand*.

²¹ Dahl, Introduction, pp. 1f.

²² *Ibid*, p. 11.

by leaders essentially loyal to the regime”, which “verges on more fundamental opposition to basic policies or institutions”, and the “opponents who wish to subvert the regime and who are prepared to participate, if need be and if the opportunity arises, in conspiracies, violence, and revolution.”²³ The first form of opposition can be called dissension and the second subversion. This classification presents a model adaptable to a Byzantine context. Moreover, Robert Dahl makes a compelling point when he insists that opposition tends more to multiplicity and diversity than to polarity, for societies are commonly formed by different groups, which sometimes superpose one another. This perspective is much more convincing than assessing opposition as a political phenomenon composed of two antagonistic groups.²⁴

Some of Dahl’s observations find counterparts in assessments of earlier milieus. In his essay on the practice of opposition in England and Scotland during the 14th and 15th century, Jörg Rogge perceives the king as an arbitrator of conflicting interests, both between crown and nobility as well as between different groups inside the nobility. In this context, opposition could arise if the king did not act according to previously established models of virtues, law compliance, and gender roles, or if the king acted against the interests of the nobility. The practice of opposition generally progressed in two stages. The first was the correction of the king’s behaviour. A disgruntled group of nobles could force a king to abandon illegal or unpopular practices by arresting or exiling him. The second was the deposition of the king, although depositions only happened in extreme cases. The objectives of oppositional movements were mainly to correct royal conduct.²⁵

Rogge’s assessment seems closer to Byzantium than most of the models proposed by political scientists, for it deals with Christian medieval polities, whose claim of divine election is similar to the Byzantine. Nevertheless, unlike Byzantium, the Scottish and English nobility were a concise and more exclusive elite, conscious of their identities and with clearly defined duties towards the crown. Since Western medieval monarchies had much stronger dynastic traditions, the throne was not easily seized, so controlling the monarch and forcing him to act according to the will of the nobility was more feasible than replacing him. Moreover, Rogge’s assessment of the political opposition in the British monarchies touches an important aspect: rebellions and

²³ Ibid, p. 12f. Giampaolo Zuchini presents a similar classification, see Zuchini, Giampaolo, Art. “Oposição”, in: Bobbio/ Matteucci/ Pasquino(ed.), *Dicionário de Política*, p. 847.

²⁴ Dahl, Introduction, pp. 1, 4–5.

²⁵ Rogge, *Rebellion oder legitimer Widerstand*, pp. 145–182.

insurgencies were not aimed to reverse the *status quo*, but rather to protect it. Therefore, opposition and forced regime changes were organized by the elite in an effort to maintain the core values and stratification of a society or, in extreme cases, to rearrange its ruling elite in times of crisis.²⁶

Although comparisons and continuities are worth studying, the Byzantine political system shall be considered in its uniqueness and stability. However, stability does not mean immobility. According to Byzantine imperial ideology, the polity reflected the heavenly order, and the use of dispensation (*oikonomia*) was tolerated so that this order could be maintained.²⁷ The political tradition in Byzantium had Roman origins and became increasingly Christian throughout the 4th and 5th centuries. The Byzantine emperor presented himself as a holy ruler, chosen by God as his representative on earth, warden of Church and protector of the Christians. He held on earth a position analogous to God in heaven. Virtues that corresponded to this sacred office were expected from him.²⁸

Modern scholars contest that the self-representation of the imperial power reflected the structures, which determined the Byzantine political life. Following a path paved by Hans-Georg Beck's initial questionings, Anthony Kaldellis reaffirms the Republican character of the Byzantine state.²⁹ According to him, byzantinists have been misguided by the sources used to assess the Byzantine political theory, whose origins are in one way or the other the imperial circle (imperial edicts, speeches and legislation). Without taking that fact properly into consideration, byzantinists have accepted the self-representation that emperors created to protect themselves during a systemic crisis in the 3rd century. After the reign of Anastasios, this idea merged with Republican ideology as a defense mechanism against political instability.³⁰

²⁶ Philippe Depreux comes to this same conclusion, see Depreux, Introduction, p. 17.

²⁷ Kazhdan/ Constable, *People and Power*, p. 161.

²⁸ Cheynet, *Se révolter*, p. 57; Dölger, *Die Kaiserurkunde*, pp. 9–33; Fögen, *Das politische Denken*, pp. 41–85; Kazhdan, *The Aristocracy*, pp. 43–57; Pertusi, *Il pensiero*, passim; Schreiner, *Das Herrscherbild*, pp. 135–151; Treitinger, *Die östromische Kaiser- und Reichsidee*. However, it is possible to see contradictions in this lofty imperial image. Illustrative is the relation of the emperor with the Law. On the one hand, the emperor was considered as the *nomos empsychos*, the Embodied Law. On the other hand, he was expected to observe the laws and traditions of the state, otherwise he could be accused of acting like a tyrant, see Beck, *Senat und Volk*, p. 51, fn. 111; Beck, *Res Publica*, pp. 28–35; Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, pp. 19–21; Fögen, *Das politische Denken*, pp. 70–71; Simon, *Princeps legibus solutus*, pp. 449–492. A good review of the great numbers of approaches to the Byzantine political thought is Carile, *Political Thought* pp. 53–85.

²⁹ Beck, *Res Publica*, pp. 379–414; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, passim.

³⁰ Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, p. 176.

According to Kaldellis, sovereignty was in the hands of the Roman people, who lent power to a particular person in order to defend the common good of the Byzantine *politeia*. This power granted the emperor an unrestrained field of action, including the Law. Yet this unrestrained power remained effective as long as it was perceived as a defense of the interests of the common good. Kaldellis calls it a “state of exception”³¹ although he never describes what the Byzantines understood as the “common good”.³² Yet the Republican ideology can also be a legitimizing element, similar to the discourse of divine election. While the latter is a *post factum* argument, which justified successful rebellions and explained failed ones, the Republican traditions presented the candidates a set of conditions to be fulfilled in order to seize power and to rule.³³ Moreover, as Jean-Claude Cheynet and Ralph-Johannes Lilie demonstrate in earlier studies and Ioannes Stouraitis in earlier ones, the Byzantine political scene was actually an arena, in which political groups struggled with one another fiercely, and the superposed ideologies left a road open to new men without establishing strict rules for the succession and conservation of power.³⁴

Although the Byzantine political reality was determined by an assembly of differing, contradictory, and superposing traditions, discourses, and ideologies, certain important elements cherished by the Byzantines appear frequently in the sources. The elections and acclamations followed a long-established tradition, according to which, in spite of the military character of his office, the emperor had to be confirmed by the senate and the people of Rome (*Senatus Populusque Romanus*). In the complicated years of the 3rd and 4th century, this practice was weakened because the emperors were elected mostly by soldiers in military camps. Hence, the senate and the people lost much of their active role, restricting themselves to approving the choices of the soldiers

³¹ Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, p. 73–88. Gilbert Dagron already mentioned a similar principle, but he names it “state of emergency”, Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, p. 20.

³² According to Beck, the common good is also the origin of the Law, see Beck, *Res Publica*, pp. 28–32. Jean Claude Cheynet reaches a similar conclusion when assessing the mechanisms that legitimated opposition in Byzantium. He states, “l'idée du pouvoir absolu de l'empereur doit être rejetée, même si c'est celle qui se dégage de la législation et de la propagande impériales. Non seulement le souverain reste le *doulos* (serviteur) du Seigneur et se doit d'observer les lois divines, ce que soulignent à l'envi tous les panégyriques, mais ses sujets considèrent implicitement, puisque le dogme officiel ne donne aucune limite au pouvoir de l'empereur, que ce dernier est lié par un contrat – moral – envers son peuple. Il est responsable du destin du peuple élu de Dieu ou, en terme plus politique, de la *politeia* des Romains, en sorte que ses actions ont nécessairement pour but sa survie et sa prospérité.” Cheynet, *Se révolter*, pp. 72f. See also Simon, *Princeps legibus solutus*, pp. 449–492.

³³ Stankovic, *Komnini u Carigradu*, p. 306; Stouraitis, *Roman Identity*, p. 192.

³⁴ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, passim; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 9–121; Stouraitis, *Review of „Kaldellis, The Byzantine Republic”*, pp. 296–297.

officially, if they were mentioned at all. This changed when the senate and the people of Constantinople, the New Rome, took on the role. The political participation of the army decreased accordingly. Hans-Georg Beck recognizes the acclamation of Leon I in 457 as a turning point because of his election by the senate, which is described here as a group of high officials. Acclamations by the palace, the army, and the people took place, but these only followed the senate's initiative. The ascension of Ioustinos I in 518 confirmed this trend. This custom was reinforced in the following years. Despite the dynastic succession and the fact that soldiers could still instate their candidates as emperors, occasionally taking the role of emperor-maker from the senate and the people and forcing them into the background, the Senate's approval, even if symbolic, was still always necessary.³⁵

The imperial acclamations were always accomplished by different sets of groups, such as soldiers, people of the capital or of the province, senators, bishops, and the patriarch, for all represented the Byzantine *politeia*, and hence – according to Kaldellis and Cheynet – had the sovereignty to elect an emperor.³⁶ Although most of those groups had clear delimitations, it is always difficult to know what the sources mean when they mention the participation of the “people”. In studies on Byzantine political institutions and practices, it is normally assumed that the only people allowed to have active political participation were the inhabitants of the capital, while the provinces were relegated to mere spectators of political life in Byzantium.³⁷ Kaldellis criticizes this view, affirming that the provincial population acted similarly to the people in Constantinople. As their metropolitan counterparts, they took a stance in each rebellion by supporting it or rejecting it. Nevertheless, the greater weight of Constantinople as the economic center, the Empire's metropolis, and the seat of the government is undeniable; consequently, its inhabitants had a greater force in political struggles.³⁸

The groups described as the “people” in Constantinople changed over time. Until the middle of the 7th century, the *demoi*, the circus' factions, were the most active

³⁵ Beck explains this development through the longer sojourns of emperors in Constantinople since the Constantinian Dynasty. In this aspect, they differed from the emperors of the 3rd century, who were more often commanders and spent more time in military camps. The emperors then started to be accompanied more by eunuchs and courtiers, who became increasingly influent. This new situation was also the result of the demilitarization of the Empire, as well of Constantinople's impregnability, see Beck, *Senat und Volk*, pp. 3–14, 18–19.

³⁶ Cheynet, *Se révolter*, pp. 72f; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, pp. 104f.

³⁷ Beck, *Senat und Volk*, pp. 24–27; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 202–205; Beck, *Konstantinopel*, pp. 11–45.

³⁸ Kaldellis, *the Byzantine Republic*, p. 150–159.

groups among the city populace, but in the following centuries, they died out as a political force.³⁹ Afterwards, the army seemed to become the main emperor-maker. It was a period in which the provincial units (*themata*) supported the ambitions of their commanders in rebellions. However, this does not mean that the “people” were excluded from the process. Kaldellis considers the army to be the “people at arms” and during the 7th and 10th century the provincial armies merged with provincial society, for the soldiers were mostly provincial peasants and the commanders were members of the local elite.⁴⁰ Moreover, the disappearance of the people of Constantinople from the reports could also be explained by the fact that the stability brought by the establishment of the Macedonian dynasty did not force the capital’s inhabitants to make political choices.

The situation changed, however, during the 11th century. By that time, the people of Constantinople became once again an active political actor, represented by the craftsmen and the merchants. Both groups became increasingly rich, but due to cultural prejudices, they lacked recognition and, therefore, they strove for the enhancement of their social position. The emperors of that time favored these groups with access to the senate for reasons that will be discussed in the following chapters. Consequently, members of the senate and the people merged politically. These urban groups were more influential in acclamations in the years between 1025 and 1081 than at any other time in Byzantium. Although troops could occasionally elect emperors, their choices had to be confirmed actively by the people and the senate. Sometimes this confirmation was unfavorable or even coerced, but before Alexios I Komnenos, no emperor asserted himself by launching an assault on Constantinople, although some rebels had the necessary resources to do it.⁴¹

As heir of the Roman *politeia*, the Byzantines were of the opinion that their Empire was a public polity that belonged to no family or clan.⁴² The rulers attempted, nevertheless, to control the succession, appointing a successor of his choosing. Therefore, the emperors used what Beck called “right of presentation”

³⁹ Beck, *Konstantinopel*, pp. 35–41; McCormick, Michael, Art. *Demoi*, in: Kazhdan, ODB, 3, 1991. pp. 608–609.

⁴⁰ Haldon, *Warfare*, pp. 256–260; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, p. 157.

⁴¹ Beck, *Senat und Volk*, pp. 30–35; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 199–205; Kaldellis, *How to Usurp*, pp. 43–56; Kazhdan/ Epstein, *Change*, pp. 69–70; Krallis, “Democratic” Action, pp. 35–53. Moreover, the appearing of “popular assemblies” should be mentioned. They were called so the emperor could create general consent in case of difficult political decisions, see Kyritses, *The Imperial Council*, pp. 57–69.

⁴² Beck, *Res Publica*, pp. 39f; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, pp. 114–115, Lillie, *Erbkaisertum*, pp. 21–41.

(*Präsentationsrecht*), which means that rulers could introduce their candidates to the groups that elected the emperor.⁴³ Moreover, Gilbert Dagron states that the imperial ideology perceived hereditary succession as a confirmation of God's approval. Thus, an emperor who managed to control his own succession and establish a successor of his own choice could argue that his position as God elected was confirmed, for the divine grace upon him was extended to his offspring.⁴⁴

Emperors could also crown co-emperors, thus establishing a partnership with another emperor who shared the acclamation, but was subordinated to the senior emperor.⁴⁵ These measures did not warrant total control over the succession by the reigning emperor after his death, but granted the then co-emperor a strong legitimacy, contributing to the founding of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties.⁴⁶ Moreover, this institution was useful to find a compromise between ambitious ascending political figures and established political groups or between competing parties. It happened mostly when the heir was underage and under the tutelage of the empress or of the regency. It was a fragile moment for the established group. Therefore, granting the co-emperorship to an important political figure normally through a marriage alliance could assure the survival of the dynasty until the underage emperor became an adult. However, it could result in an awkward situation, since it often led to two competing groups sharing power. The outcome was always turbulent. The result was one group ousting the other. The established group could expel the new one, as Konstantinos VII did with the sons of Romanos I Lakapenos in 944 and as the Doukas sabotaged and deposed Romanos IV in 1071. It was equally possible that the new group removed the preceding régime, as Andronikos I Komnenos ordered the murder of Alexios II Komnenos in 1182 or Michael VII Palaiologos blinded Ioannes IV in 1261.⁴⁷

In the 11th century, a new form of legitimacy gained importance. In the 9th century, families started to monopolize offices in the bureaucracy and especially in the army.⁴⁸ Although the Macedonian emperors created legislation and implemented reforms to limit the influence of the provincial powerful over the soldiers, aristocratic

⁴³ Beck, *Senat und Volk*, p. 6.

⁴⁴ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, p. 23

⁴⁵ On the co-emperorship in Byzantium, see Kresten/ Müller, *Samtherrschaft*, passim; Ostrogorsky, *Das Mitkaisertum*, pp. 166–178; Zuckermann, *On the Titles*, pp. 867–890

⁴⁶ Dagron, *Emperor and Priest*, pp. 24–36; Fögen, *Das politische Denken*, p. 54f; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 29–30; Stankovic, *Komnini u Carigradu*, pp. 305–311; Stankovic, *La porphyrogénèse*, pp. 99–208.

⁴⁷ Cheynet, *Se révolter*, pp. 67f.

⁴⁸ See Ch. 1.1

families were able to control the political scene in that century. This development introduced a new idea that the emperor had to be an offspring from one of the few families with an expressive number of members in offices over a long period. This characteristic was described by the Byzantines as good-birth or “*eugēneia*”. With the end of the Macedonian dynasty and the beginning of aristocratic control over political life, *eugēneia* became a legitimacy factor.⁴⁹

Although the 11th-century historian Michael Psellos was conditional defender of the aristocratic ideal, he emphasized the elevated origins of the Doukai.⁵⁰ Micheal Attaleiates, who was also a historian, criticized Nikephoros Bryennios for claiming the throne at the same time as his hero Nikephoros Botaneiates. In his opinion, Bryennios was of lower origin because he was a Western, whilst Botaneiates was an Eastern aristocrat, whose family had a longer and more successful history in imperial service.⁵¹ Moreover, Attaleiates states that the Botaneiatas were related to the Phokades, and, in a more distant degree, with Konstantinos the Great and the Fabii of the Republican Rome. All these characteristics made Botaneiates in Attaleiates’ opinion a better candidate than Bryennios.⁵²

The flexibility of Byzantine political thought allowed emperors great freedom of action to establish reforms and introduce novelties, while the conservative self-image of the Byzantines could be maintained. Furthermore, it made possible to justify successful usurpations if the rebel fulfilled the conditions to legitimate his rule. If the usurper was acclaimed by representatives of the political groups, crowned by the patriarch of Constantinople, achieved military victories and ruled according to the expectation of his subjects, the new government would achieve legitimacy. Hence, the political tradition described above did not need to be questioned if a person or a group had ambitions for power.

⁴⁹ Bravo Garcia/ Alvarez Arza, *La Civilización bizantina*, pp. 110f; Dudek, *Pęknięte zwierciadło*, pp. 345–354; Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L’aristocrazia*, pp. 77–79; Kazhdan/ Epstein, *Change*, pp.110–116. For a later period, see Angelov, *Imperial Ideology*, pp. 116–125.

⁵⁰ Michael Psellos praises the Athenian tradition of considering not only the nobility of blood but also the character and capacity when choosing people for public offices, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, 134. In another passage, the same author praises the ancestors of Konstantinos Doukas and assumes that his imperial destiny was defined by them, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 98 (a6).

⁵¹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 287–288.

⁵² Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 223–229.

Rebelling against the emperor was still *a priori* an illegal and sinful act.⁵³ According to Theodosian Law and the *Digestes*, rebels should be punished with the death penalty, torture or confiscation.⁵⁴ According to the *Ekloga*, the punishment for those cases should be decided individually by the emperors in order to avoid the risk of injustice due to the judge's personal grudges.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, death penalties, as well as confiscations, appeared again as punishments in *Procheiros Nomos*.⁵⁶

Rebellions were considered acts of tyranny. This concept meant in ancient times a sort of illegal rule that was not legitimized by formal institutions. In Byzantium, "tyrant" had a more plastic meaning, for it was applied to the rebels by the reigning emperor's supporters and, at the same time, to the emperor whom the rebel was trying to depose.⁵⁷ In the end, only the outcome of the rebellion decided who the tyrant and who the legitimate ruler was. It was a conclusion reached in hindsight⁵⁸ The Byzantine political ideology offered a solution for dealing with this internal contradiction: the theological and political conception that God transferred his favour from one person to another. Accordingly, the emperor was elected by God to be his representative on earth in order to lead and protect the Christian Roman people. Yet if this chosen person did not exercise his authority in accordance with God's will, the divine favor would be accorded to someone else, who, in turn, should become the emperor. This concept is very well illustrated in the letter or speech of resignation by Eirene, the Athenian, to Nikephoros I as transmitted by Theophanes Confessor in which she recognized that due to her crimes Nikephoros was chosen by God to depose her.⁵⁹

⁵³ On political repression in Byzantium, Angelov, *Power and Subversion*, pp. 1–18; Bourdara, *Καθοσιωσις*; Bourdara, *Les Crimes*, pp. 535–543; Brandes, *Kaiserprophetien*, 157–200; Brandes *Anmerkung*, pp. 217–226; Brandes, *Der Nika-Aufstand*, pp. 539–565; Brandes, *Eine Verschwörung*, pp. 357–386; Gouillard, *Le procès*, pp. 134–174; Heher, *Heads on Stakes*, pp. 12–20; Kazhdan, Alexander, Art. "Rebellion", in: Kazhdan, ODB, 3, p. 1776; Kazhdan, Alexander, Art. "Usurpation", in: Kazhdan, ODB, 3, pp. 2145f; Krallis, *Harmless satire*, pp. 221–245; Lilie, *Erbkaiserum*, pp. 21–41; Patlagean, *Byzance et le blason pénal du corps*, pp. 405–427.

⁵⁴ Watson, *Digest*, 48.4. "Ad legem ivliam maiestatis"; Mommsen, *Codex Theodosianus*, 8.4.1. "Si quis imperatori maledixit" and 8.5.1. "Ad legem ivliam maiestatis".

⁵⁵ Burgmann, *Ecloga*, 17, 3; See also Von Lingenthal, *Geschichte*, pp. 336f; Vučetić, *Bestimmungen*, pp. 182–188.

⁵⁶ Zepos/ Zepos, *Jus Graecoromanum*, 2, 39.10, p. 217: 'Ο κατὰ τῆς σωτηρίας τοῦ βασιλέως μελετήσας, φονεύεται καὶ δημεύεται; Scheltema/ Van der Wal, *Basilicorum libri LX*, Series A, Vol. 8, 60.36.

⁵⁷ On the concept of tyranny in Byzantium, see Bourdara, *Καθοσιωσις*, pp. 137–141; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 177–184; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, pp. 45–48; Morris, *Succession and Usurpation*, pp. 199–214; Neville, *Authority*, pp. 39–65. On general and theoretical aspects of tyrants and tyranny, see Kauffmann, *Vom Ungehorsam*, pp. 87–113; Spörl, *Gedanken*, pp. 87–113.

⁵⁸ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 177–183; Neville, *Authority*, pp. 44f; Kaldellis, *How to Usurp*, p. 52.

⁵⁹ Theophanes Confessor, *Chronographia*, 478f. On Eirene's deposition, see Lilie, *Byzanz unter Eirene*, pp. 105–111.

In spite of cultural changes, administrative reforms, and political turns, the Romans retained the understanding of their polity as public entity well into Byzantine times. Cheynet highlights how central the “common good” was to the legitimacy of one’s rule.⁶⁰ Kaldellis points out the existence of a second state of exception, the first being the imperial power: the people. According to him, the fate of the Roman and Byzantine *politeia* was decided by the people. Hence, there was no illegality in the rebellious actions of a mob, so that the outcome was considered legitimate and not contested. Although rebellions might have involved murder, aggression, plundering or destruction of private property, no emperor tried to prosecute those responsible for a mob action, for it was considered extra-legal and their decision legitimate in itself.⁶¹ The doctrine of God’s favor was introduced to Christianize this ancient political tradition. It raised the emperor above the rest of society, divinizing him, in order to protect the ruler from the intrinsic dangers of his office.⁶²

One of the shortcomings in Kaldellis’ study on Byzantine political system is that he wants to present a stable picture of the Byzantine political tradition, in other words, to reconstruct a Byzantine political theory that was never theorized. Therefore, he is not interested in idiosyncratic developments or the social background of the oppositional movements, and indeed goes so far as to deny them, as with the increasing popular participation in politics during the 11th century.⁶³ Another shortcoming in his study is the concept of the common good, repeatedly regarded as the final purpose of any political action. Nevertheless, Kaldellis does not specify what the Byzantines understood as the common good. Moreover, he stated that the rebellions in Byzantium were ideologically empty popularity contests.⁶⁴ This thesis surely demonstrates that the ideological justifications (what was understood as the “common good”?) are historically conditioned.⁶⁵

After considering the specificities of Byzantine political thought and practice, it is possible to propose an analytical model. Byzantium’s political system differed from our modern ones. It did not have political parties, so the modern concepts of political participation and political thought would be strange to the Byzantines. Yet hegemonic systems as described by Robert Dahl are similar to Byzantium in their legal intolerance

⁶⁰ Cheynet, *Se révolter*, pp. 70–72.

⁶¹ Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, pp. 96–98.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 173–178.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 135f

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 158.

⁶⁵ See Ch. 6.

of opposition. His analytical model of opposition to a hegemonic system can be juxtaposed with Rogge's conclusions on the opposition in medieval Scottish and English societies and adapted to the Byzantine context.

Considering that Byzantines, as a rule, did not question their political system and opposition – as Philippe Depreux observed⁶⁶ – was aimed at the maintenance of the *status quo*, we propose the following classification for the analysis of the political opposition in Byzantium: 1) Factional and interest-based opposition by individuals essentially loyal to the regime. These did not intend to depose the emperor but desired a change in his policies and actions on particular issues. We will see that the churchmen and Alexios' direct family represented a significant portion of this type of opposition. 2) To the subversive opposition belonged the individuals or groups that believed that the rule of the reigning emperor was essentially flawed or illegitimate because it was not working for their interests and/or it was acting against their understanding of the common good. Thus, they acted towards deposing the reigning emperor and establishing a ruler who would comply with their interests and/or that of their polity.⁶⁷

In spite of the chronological proximity and a wide range of shared values, the comparison with late Western medieval political systems such as 14th and 15th century England and Scotland analyzed by Rogge is also limited. Western medieval societies had a clearly delineated elite. Although, as mentioned, we see the rise of a more stable aristocracy in Byzantium from the 9th century onwards, Byzantine society never reached the level of social stratification found in the Western medieval world. Theoretically, all levels of the Byzantine imperial service were open to everyone. This was not the reality in the Scottish and English context assessed by Jörg Rogge. Unless he belonged even indirectly to the reigning dynasty, an English or Scottish noble could not aspire to the throne, regardless of how powerful he was. Therefore, the path of “correcting” the king was in most cases the only one available.

This characteristic presents serious limitations to any comparison between Western and Byzantine political practices but does not hinder it. The imperial diadem might theoretically have been accessible to everyone and the Byzantine political traditions offered resources to justify rebellions and legitimize them if successful. However, they did not guarantee success and most rebellions failed. Rebellions against

⁶⁶ See Introduction, fn. 26.

⁶⁷ Probably based in similar theoretic apparatus, Dimiter Angelov lists two kinds of subversion in Byzantium: a pointed subversion, which was *ad hoc* resistance to a person or to a discourse, and systemic subversion, see Angelov, *Power and Subversion*, p. 7f.

emperors were dangerous and, once started, could not be stopped. Accordingly, the caution in practicing opposition observed by Rogge in medieval Scotland and England is also observed in Byzantium. Dissatisfaction with the emperor's policies was expressed in private circles or hidden in panegyric discourses.⁶⁸ As in England and Scotland, Byzantine oppositional movements tried initially to urge the monarch towards acceptable agency. Deposition attempts were thus escalations of dissatisfaction caused by internal and external developments. Although rebellions needed planning, their outbreak was a leap into the dark, since the rebel could only know who his supporters really were, once he had decided on rebellion. The risk of finding himself alone and without supporters was considerable.⁶⁹ Hence, it is important to assess the opposition as a gradual phenomenon, but very dynamic and rebellions as its extreme and therefore visible events. Furthermore, at times, the two kinds of opposition listed above – dissension and subversive opposition – were so intermingled that a clear differentiation is not always possible.

As far as the rebel's support base is concerned, Robert Dahl proposes an interesting model. He denies the existence of two antagonizing blocks, understanding opposition as a multifactorial phenomenon. Dahl affirms that the more open a regime is, the greater the number of interest groups is.⁷⁰ Yet it does not mean that in "more closed" regimes different groups do not exist. They are simply off the radar. Since Byzantium was simultaneously a closed regime, since the reigning emperor and legislation did not allow opposition, and an open regime, for their political traditions legitimized usurpation quite easily, we observe various groups exerting pressure on the emperor and occasionally trying to depose him. However, these factions were very fluid, responding to immediate events and developments.

i.iii Sources

The sources for this dissertation are written sources such as historiographies, hagiographic texts, imperial speeches and reports on synods. Hence, before dealing with

⁶⁸ Mullett, *How to criticize*, pp. 247–262.

⁶⁹ As in the case of Theodosios Monomachos during the reign of Michael VI or of Alexios Komnenos when he presented Konstantios Doukas to the people of Constantinople. Both were rejected, see Kaldellis, *How to Usurp*, pp. 44–46.

⁷⁰ See Introduction, fn. 24.

the sources individually, it is imperative to addressing the issue of how Byzantine texts should be read.⁷¹

In their survey on the state of Byzantine Studies in their days, Alexander Kazhdan and Giles Constable admonish further studies on Byzantium that search for indirect information. They state that by asking the sources “questions that their creator never intended to be asked, [...] they can thus be compelled to give evidence about facts that stood outside the interests and imagination of medieval authors, who in this way unconsciously and unintentionally provide a type of information that we shall here call indirect.”⁷² Besides the importance of the quest for indirect information, the authors emphasize the significance of ambiguity, also in the assessment of the causes of events. Kazhdan and Constable state, “owing largely to modern experience, many events of the past are now seen to have had more than one consequence, sometimes to have involved contradictory elements, can be variously viewed, and were – to use the aforementioned new word – ambivalent.”⁷³

In his contribution *How Should A Byzantine Text Be Read?*, Jakov Ljubarskij states that Byzantine texts should be read considering their symbolic references. Consequently, the author believes that Byzantine texts “are to be evaluated as artistic works and should be read as multi-dimensional texts with overtones, and these overtones can often be the most significant element of the composition.”⁷⁴

In her study of Nikephoros Bryennios’s *Material For History*, Leonora Neville notices the ambiguity of the Byzantine text. She says, “some writers wove hidden meanings into their texts that could only be understood by certain members of their audience. [...] Embedding multiple meanings in a text was a means of intellectual play as well as a means of criticizing without exposing oneself.”⁷⁵ Neville concludes that Nikephoros Bryennios used this rhetorical method to criticize Alexios Komnenos and to praise his grandfather Nikephoros Bryennios, the rebel blinded in consequence of his defeat by Alexios Komnenos.

⁷¹ On Byzantine texts in general, Ljubarskij, *How should*, pp. 117–125; On historiography specifically Lilie, *Reality and Invention*, pp. 157–210. In the last International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Belgrade, a plenary was organized to discuss forms of reading Byzantine historiography and how the information they provide can be interpreted, see Kaldellis, *The Manufacture*, pp. 293–306; Macrides, *How the Byzantines Wrote*, pp. 257–263; Neville, *Why Did the Byzantine*, pp. 265–277; Treadgold, *The Unwritten Rules*, pp. 277–292.

⁷² Kazhdan/ Constable, *People and Power*, p. 165.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 141.

⁷⁴ Ljubarskij, *How should*, p. 125.

⁷⁵ Neville, *Heroes*, p. 32.

Ralph-Johannes Lilie lists several aspects in Byzantine history writing, which should be considered when dealing with the information they provided, such as the use of rhetorical techniques (characterization by deeds, over-dramatization, bonmots and sayings, epic elements, timeless episodes, and anonymous citations); references to the supernatural; conceptual problems; and deliberate tendentious modifications.⁷⁶ These aspects reveal two important characteristics of Byzantine historiography: the partisanship of the authors, which is a general characteristic of all historiographic traditions, and the particular understanding of truth held by Byzantine historiographers. In a recent presentation, Anthony Kaldellis lists “unhistorical” elements present in Byzantine historiography. Despite denying that there is no factuality in the Byzantine histories, he points out that the historical narrative in Byzantium had a heavily rhetorical and literary character. In order to express their perception of the historical characters, the Byzantine author invented gossip, copied ancient authors, elaborated their narratives according to rhetorical models and dramatized episodes. Kaldellis concludes, to the desperation of historians dedicated to Byzantium, that a replicable method of reading Byzantine histories does not exist. Each work is different and demands different forms of reading.⁷⁷

In their *prooimia*, all historians claimed that their main purpose was to tell the truth. Although this was surely an expression of Thucydidean models, it does not mean that the Byzantine author did not consider truth important.⁷⁸ According to Lilie, amusement was the main goal of the historiographic genre. The readers pleased themselves in reading and listening to stories about famous people, especially courtiers and rulers. Therefore, exaggerated or unbelievable episodes were not taken as literal truth or as forgery, but rather as a matter of characterization.⁷⁹ Lilie asserts that “if it was a standard authorial practice to alter accounts so as to present a more colorful portrait of people and their characters, to shift events, deeds, speeches, and sayings both in time and space, and to deploy anonymous quotations in order for an author to demonstrate his own erudition and to satisfy that of his listeners and readers, then Byzantine historical writing can no longer be regarded as comparable to today’s.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Lilie, *Reality and Invention*, pp. 157–210.

⁷⁷ Kaldellis, *The Manufacture*, pp. 293–306; Ruth Macrides reaches a similar conclusion in *Macrides, How the Byzantines Wrote*, pp. 257–263.

⁷⁸ Lilie, *Reality and Invention*, p. 161. On *prooimia* of historiographical works, see Grigoriadis, *Linguistic and Literary Studies*, pp. 29–52; Magdalino, *Byzantine Historical Writing*, pp. 219f.

⁷⁹ Lilie, *Reality and Invention*, pp. 204–206.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

However, the founders of Byzantine Studies were heavily influenced by positivist ideas of objective truth and made great efforts to find it in Byzantine sources. They expected, maybe unconsciously, that Byzantine historians fostered an idea of truth similar to their own. Lilie clearly demonstrates that this was not the case, comparing Byzantine historiography with an impressionistic painting or “even better with the pointillist style: the overall impression of the picture is the decisive criterion, while the individual significance of the single dot of color is primarily determined by its effect within the picture as a whole. In itself, it has no – or very little – significance.”⁸¹

Ambivalence and concealed meanings became very important when the years of political unrest ended with the accession of Alexios I. Previously, political instability and constant regime changes led to the appearance of critical assessments of deposed governments. Sometimes, in order to criticize rulers they did not approve of, Byzantine historians were forced to eulogize their protectors, the reigning emperor, insincerely, as Michael Attaleiates apparently did for Nikephoros III Botaneiates and Michael Psellos for Michael VII Doukas.⁸² The Komnenian supremacy restricted the author’s criticism towards the dynasty. The Komnenoi did have several enemies, but the political success of the Komnenoi kept enemies at bay, unable to sponsor open criticism.⁸³ For this reason, Byzantine authors had to resort to their highly sophisticated rhetorical training in order to criticize the emperors safely by subverting *topoi*; omitting or substituting information; using virtue codes to suggest inadequacy; praising the emperor for virtues that he did not have, making unfavorable comparisons; using *topoi* from other genres to imply an inadequacy for the role; using dreams to create a negative impression; and praising desired feats not yet accomplished.⁸⁴

The reign of Alexios Komnenos was a foundational one. This emperor was not only the founder of a dynasty on which his direct and indirect descendants based their claim to legitimacy, Alexios’ acts as an emperor and the ideology he fostered also

⁸¹ Lilie, *Reality and Invention*, p. 209. Kaldellis reaches similar conclusions on the subordination of truth to rhetorical tools by the Byzantine historians. In his opinion, fictive accounts could be used to construct a characterization of a particular person, Kaldellis, *The Corpus*, pp. 220.

⁸² On the partisanship of both authors, Krallis, *Attaleiates as a Reader*, pp. 167–19; Krallis, Michael Attaleiates, pp. 71–114; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 122–134, 135–143; Vryonis Jr., *Michael Psellus, Michael Attaleiates*, pp. 3–14. The problems involved in criticizing emperors were recently assessed by Warren Treadgold. He affirms that “while that a contemporary historian might need to protect himself by omitting justified criticism of powerful people, the Byzantines admired historians who included criticism when it deserved”. Treadgold, *The Unwritten Rules*, p. 292.

⁸³ A full discussion about *Kaiserkritik* on the times of Komnenian rule on Ch. 6.1.

⁸⁴ Mullett, *How to Criticize*, p. 262.

became a paradigm and a source of comparison.⁸⁵ Therefore, it was of major importance to know who Alexios Komnenos was and what kind of emperor he was. The first steps in that direction were taken during the reign of his son, Ioannes II Komnenos (1118–1143), when the former Empress Eirene Doukaina requested her son-in-law Nikephoros Bryennios to write a history of Alexios's reign, a task he never finished, which was later undertaken by his wife, Anna Komnene.⁸⁶

There is also a text entitled the *Muses*, which contains advice supposedly given by Alexios I to his son Ioannes II.⁸⁷ Though its authorship is contested, it was probably written in Ioannes II's inner circle in the first years of his reign to reinforce the legitimacy of his troubled succession.⁸⁸ Moreover, Ioannes II Komnenos had himself portrayed mourning his father in a pictorial representation at the Blachernae Palace. Later, the Emperor Manuel I Komnenos, Alexios's grandson, also used the image of Alexios, but in a different and more extensive manner than his father did. While Ioannes II presented himself as the mourning, loving son, whose succession was desired and blessed by his father, Manuel I presented himself as the greatest of the Komnenoi, whose feats surpassed those of his father and grandfather. Anna Komnene's decision to complete her husband's unfinished work was most likely motivated by these appropriations (or – in Anna's opinion – misappropriations) of Alexios's image and reign.⁸⁹

Ioannes Zonaras and Niketas Choniates were also motivated by their desire to give their account of the facts. Unlike Anna Komnene and the successors of Alexios Komnenos, who were struggling for their position as his legitimate heirs, Zonaras and Choniates criticized the Komnenian system and the legitimacy of their policies. Interestingly, they provide the only critical accounts on the Komnenian system, most likely because of their chronological detachment. Both authors will be examined individually in the following lines.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, passim; Hill, *Actions*, pp. 45–62; Howard-Johnston, *Anna Komnene*, pp. 260–302; Laiou, *Why Anna Komnene?* pp. 1–15; Magdalino, *The Pen of the Aunt*, pp. 14–43; Stankovic, *La porphyrogénèse*, pp. 99–108.

⁸⁶ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, pp. 70–72.

⁸⁷ Maas (ed.), *Die Musen*, pp. 348–369.

⁸⁸ Mullett, *Whose Muses?*, pp. 195–220; Reinsch, *Bemerkungen*, pp. 404–419. The partisans of Alexios I as an author are represented here, see Magdalino, *The Empire*, pp. 25–27; Shepard, *Father' or 'scorpion'?*, pp. 68–132. For a revisionist reading of the Alexios' succession and of the *Muses*, see Neville, *Anna Komnene*, pp. 146–148. A deeper discussion on Neville's propositions is developed below.

⁸⁹ Magdalino, *The Pen of the Aunt*, p. 22.

⁹⁰ Lilie, *Niketas*, pp. 89–101; Magdalino, *Kaiserkritik*, pp. 326–246; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 144–147.

The assessments on Alexios I's reign were mostly late accounts. The *Alexiad*, written by Anna Komnene is a work whose dating can be established with more certainty, for it was finished in the reign of Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180), at least thirty years after Alexios' death.⁹¹ Ioannes Zonaras might have written earlier, but his biography is less known, so no clear conclusions can be reached.⁹² Naturally, the *Materials for History* precedes all of them, for it was ordered by Eirene Doukaina after her husband's death and written intermittently for the rest of Nikephoros Bryennios' life, between 1118 and 1138.⁹³ Nevertheless, he left his work unfinished and only managed to deal with the events before the ascension of Alexios Komnenos in 1081.

Nikephoros Bryennios, Anna Komnene, Ioannes Zonaras and Niketas Choniates, the most important historians who devoted themselves to aspects of Alexios's reign, wrote decades after the death of Alexios Komnenos. After the troubled reign of the first Komnenos, the family government established by Alexios I Komnenos in his seizure of power at Easter 1081 reached its peak in the reign of his son and grandson. Manuel I was able to control a huge family network that was built through marriage connections and blood relations, not without disturbance, but with a strong hand.⁹⁴ Thus, it was natural that authors dealing with the genesis of this regime projected – maybe unconsciously – their contemporary situation to the past and assumed that Alexios Komnenos had a similar command over his family.⁹⁵ However, a more careful reading of the same sources suggests a different picture. The Komnenian system was founded through a troubled birth and it was very frail in its first years. It only managed to survive due to favorable conditions and through the skillful political action of its founders, the Emperor Alexios I, his brother Isaak Komnenos and their mother Anna Dalassene.

⁹¹ Anna complains that her brother and her nephew were ruining the legacy of her father. This makes 1143 the *terminus post quem*, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, iii, 9.

⁹² Bachin/ Lane, *The History of Zonaras*, pp. 2–7; Kazhdan, Alexander, Art. „Zonaras, John“, in: Kazhdan, ODB, vol. 3, pp. 2229; Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 416–418; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 144–147.

⁹³ *Terminus ante quem* for the death of Eirene Doukaina is 1136, for she is listed in the *typikon* of Pantokrator as a late member of the imperial house. Gautier proposes 1133 as the year of Eirene Doukaina's death. Nikephoros Bryennios is also listed there, but Gautier finds evidence in the *Alexiad* that he died in 1138, see Gautier, *Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator*, pp. 42.

⁹⁴ Magdalino, *The Empire*, pp. 180–227.

⁹⁵ Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 32f.

i.iii.i *Material for History of Nikephoros Bryennios*

As mentioned above, Nikephoros Bryennios wrote his *Material for History* in response to a request from his mother-in-law, Eirene Doukaina, to compile the deeds of the Emperor Alexios I.⁹⁶ He states that his work was neither rhetorical nor historiographical, but rather a source for those who were engaged in writing about Alexios, hence the title *Material for History* (*Hyle Historias* in Greek).⁹⁷ Although Bryennios died before he could give his account of the facts during Alexios's reign, and the last events he narrates can be dated to 1080, he provided precious information about the families Komnenos, Doukas, and Bryennios.⁹⁸ His remarks on struggles within and between these families, which formed the main core of the Komnenos establishment after the coup d'état of 1081, represent serious challenges for long-established views about the unity of this so-called clan, as well as for our understanding of how family issues intermingled with politics in Byzantium.⁹⁹

Alexander Kazhdan considers this work as a narrative focused on the marriage between Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina. They were members of two rival families who overcame difficulties in order to be together as in a romance.¹⁰⁰ In her study of the *Material for History*, Leonora Neville refutes this conclusion, stating that it was in fact intended to be a family memoir, for it portrays members of the Komnenos, Doukas and Bryennios families tackling the Empire's internal and external problems, actions in which the members of these same lineages were engaged by the time the work was composed.¹⁰¹ Although requested by Alexios's wife and written for a readership composed of Alexios' descendants and relatives, Neville perceives signs of a

⁹⁶ In this thesis, the edition and translation by Paul Gautier will be used. For a full reference of the edition and translation used in this study, please go to the bibliography.

⁹⁷ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, p. 71–73: οὔτε γὰρ ἱστορίαν συγγράφειν προήρημαι· οὔτε πλέκειν ἐκεῖνον ἐγκώμιον—μόλις γὰρ ἂν πρὸς ταῦτα ἢ τε Θουκυδίδου δεινότης καὶ τὸ Δημοσθένους ἐξήρκεσε μεγαλόφωνον—ἀλλ' ἀφορμὴν τινα παρασχεῖν βουλόμενος τοῖς τὰ ἐκείνου συγγράφειν ἐθέλουσι πρὸς ταυτηνὴ τὴν γραφὴν ἐξώρμησα· ταύτη τοι καὶ **Ἰστορίας** ὄνομα ἔστω τῷ λόγῳ. (Indeed, it was not my intention neither to write a history nor compose an eulogy for him [Alexios I] – for only it would be enough to those subjects the grandiloquent severity of Thucydides and Demosthenes – but intending to produce some material to those who want to write about this subjects, I rushed to this writing; thus this work was called **Material for History**.)

⁹⁸ In his last pages, Bryennios gives the account of the rebellion of Nikephoros Melissenos and the imperial reaction, see Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 31–40, p. 300–310. According to Cheynet, Nikephoros Melissenos rebelled at October 1080, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 88f.

⁹⁹ For views concerning unity and dissension in the Komnenian establishment, see Ch. 3.4, 4.1 and 4.3.

¹⁰⁰ Kazhdan/ Constable, *People and Power*, p. 113. Also on *Hyle Historias* and its author, Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 394–400, Neville, *John Doukas*, pp. 168–188; Neville, *Guide*, pp. 169–173; Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, pp. 344–354.

¹⁰¹ Neville, *Heroes*, p. 38.

light *Kaiserkritik* in Bryennios' lines. In her opinion, Bryennios was influenced by the increasing interest in Roman values and identity in the Byzantine court. He, therefore, presents his grandfather, the rebel Nikephoros Bryennios, as a typical Roman *vir* who respected strict morals and fought openly, while Alexios was depicted as a trickster and only half a man due to the close link he maintained with his mother after reaching adult age.

Neville finds traits of censure in Bryennios' account of how Alexios fought using guile and deception; Neville describes it as, "fighting like a Turk". She affirms, "any one of these strands of criticism could be dismissed as incidental, but together they reinforce each other and make it difficult to escape the conclusion that overall Nikephoros held a negative view of Alexios's character. Nikephoros appears to have worked to create a portrait of Alexios that denigrates his character as not properly masculine in a classical Roman sense. Alexios may have been very successful, but he was not a virtuous man"¹⁰² Interestingly, Zonaras came to the opposite conclusion: Alexios was a virtuous man, but a bad emperor.¹⁰³ Neville's conclusion has internal coherence if one considers that the author was based solely on the *mos maiorum*, but it was probably not the only source for models of political and military behaviour.

Later in the text, Neville balances her views, saying that "the reading that Nikephoros did not write this text to rouse people against Alexios and John but rather to reconcile courtiers to the reality that a ruthless politician, like Alexios Komnenos, was exactly the right person for the job, would fit well with later time of composition."¹⁰⁴ In her view, the Bryennioi and the Doukai are the most favorably depicted in *Material for History* and this was a sort of compensation for these two families for having lost their place through the ascension of the Komnenoi. The Doukai were set aside in the new system of titles created by Alexios I and did not receive lands in Europe to compensate the lands lost in Anatolia. Although the authority of Bryennioi was confirmed in the region of Adrianople and they behaved faithfully during Alexios's reign, Neville considers that they resented having lost the imperial power to the Komnenoi.¹⁰⁵ In the following chapters, a conception of the imperial family will be presented that challenges, at least partially, the conclusions presented by Neville.

¹⁰² Neville, *Heroes*, p. 70.

¹⁰³ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn* 766. On Zonaras' characterization of Alexios I, see Magdalino, *Kaiserkritik*, pp. 326–346.

¹⁰⁴ Neville, *Heroes*, p. 177.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

i.iii.ii The *Alexiad* of Anna Komnene

The *Alexiad* by Anna Komnene is by far the most important source for a study of the political struggles during her father's reign. It is well documented, comprehensive, and gives the perspective of someone who witnessed a significant part of the narrated events.¹⁰⁶ Nonetheless, the *Alexiad* is still a problematic source. Concerning the authorship, the scholarship has considered how much is Anna Komnene's work and how much is taken from the work Nikephoros Bryennios left undone. James Howard-Johnston questions Anna Komnene's authorship due to its focus on military campaigns and external politics. According to Howard-Johnston, a Byzantine princess with no military experience, who spent most of her life in palaces and whose only political initiative failed miserably, could not be the author of such a narrative. For that reason, he attributes the military and political reports to Nikephoros Bryennios. Afterwards, Anna Komnene reorganized all the drafts left by her husband and created a narrative not centered on events, but on her father.¹⁰⁷

This vision was heavily contested by Ruth Macrides and Barbara Hill. In their opinion, Anna Komnene's narrative reinforced her imperial claims and criticized her father's successors.¹⁰⁸ Neville uses a stronger argument, asserting that Anna Komnene did not need to have possessed battlefield experience to write battle accounts. She could certainly find models in classic historiography accessible to men and women alike.¹⁰⁹ Another argument might be added for Anna's authorship. While the traditional modesty expected from women limited their access to army officers, often men who did not belong to their kin, the Komnenian regime turned power into a family business, which enabled a woman like Anna Komnene to have access to politicians and commanders, for they were family after all. Furthermore, Neville points out that one of Anna Komnene's

¹⁰⁶ In this thesis, the edition by Diether Roderich Reinsch and Athanasios Kambilyls will be used. The translations to English by E. R. A. Sewters revised by Peter Frankopan and to German by Reinsch will be consulted. Check bibliography for references of edition and translations. On general aspects on the *Alexiad* and its author, see Buckler, *Anna Komnene*, passim; Buckley, *Alexiad*, passim; Gouma-Peterson (ed.), *Anna Komnene and Her Times*, passim; Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 400–409; Neville, *Anna Komnene*, passim; Vilimonović, *Structure*; Neville, *Guide*, pp. 174–185; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, passim; Treadgold, *The Middle Byzantine Historians*, pp. 366–386.

¹⁰⁷ Howard-Johnston, *Anna Komnene*, pp. 260–302.

¹⁰⁸ Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, pp. 142–148; Macrides, *The Pen and the Sword*, pp. 63–81.

¹⁰⁹ Neville, *Heroes*, pp. 182–193. In later book, Leonora Neville presents a revisionist hypothesis according to which Anna Komnene never tried to depose her brother Ioannes II. The account of Choniates, which describes her efforts to take power, were inventions as part of his characterization of the Komnenos family and its dysfunctions. This proposition will be thoroughly discussed in the section dedicated to Choniates' work, see Neville, *Anna Komnene*, pp. 91–174.

intentions was to correct how her husband, Nikephoros Bryennios, depicted her father. According to Neville, Anna Komnene portrayed aspects of Alexios' personality, which had been given a negative connotation in Bryennios' work, in a positive light. Alexios' use of stratagems was a case in point. While Bryennios portrays negatively the episodes in which Alexios used tricks to overcome his adversaries, Anna Komnene makes them part of the characterization of her father's cunning.¹¹⁰

In a more recent monography, Larisa Vilimonović develops the argument of conflicting narratives by arguing that Anna Komnene emphasized the role of her mother's family both in Alexios' seizure of power and in his government, reinforced her connection with her mother Eirene and her temporarily mother-in-law Maria of Alania and exposed – even if not evidently – the disagreements between Eirene and her son Ioannes Komnenos. By doing that, Anna Komnene was supposedly stating that the Doukas family had a stronger legitimacy than the Komnenoi, and her connection with both lines of the Doukas family was stronger than that of her brother. This would have created an alternative narrative of dynastic legitimacy that contradicted those of her siblings. Vilimonović interprets the *Alexiad* as Anna Komnene's attempt to present a portrayal of her father's reign which was different from the one brought up by the circle of supporters of her brother Ioannes II (1118–1143) and her nephew Manuel I. Vilimonović also finds criticisms to Alexios in the *Alexiad*, for example, when Anna Komnene mentions the gossip about a supposed affair between Maria of Alania and her father, as well as Maria's participation in the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes (1094).¹¹¹ This line of argument neglects the fact that her readership was familiar with those episodes. Hence, if Anna Komnene had decided not to address them, the readers would have questioned the truthfulness of her account.

The chronology of the *Alexiad* is also faulty. In general, her narrative follows the chronological order, but Anna Komnene dislocates particular events and connects them with others of much earlier or later times, for reasons that Anna Komnene left us to conjecture.¹¹² One known example is the Bogomil trial, which is placed in the last chapter and just before the account of Alexios's death.¹¹³ According to her account, the *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos participated in the hearings. However, he died between 1102 and 1104; consequently, the proceedings against the Bogomils most

¹¹⁰ Neville, *Heroes*, pp. 182–193.

¹¹¹ Vilimonović, *Structure*, p. 219, 238.

¹¹² This recourse was already noticed in the first monograph about Alexios I, Chalandon, *Essai*, p. xvi.

¹¹³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 15, viii–x.

likely happened before that date.¹¹⁴ Anna Komnene is preparing the scene of her father's death by presenting a man abandoning mundane preoccupations, devoting himself entirely to higher and more divine causes. Anna Komnene also connects this set of events with the expansion of the *Orphanotropheion*, the imperial orphanage though its foundation was undoubtedly much earlier.¹¹⁵ Many other examples could be mentioned, but it would be exhausting to list each single case. The most important is to emphasize that the sequence of events given by Anna's narration cannot be automatically understood as a chronological sequence.

As the narrative economy, the portrayal of Anna Komnene's family in the *Alexiad* also deserves attention, for it cannot be adopted at face value. As it has been often stated, Anna Komnene wrote long after her father's death, finishing her *Alexiad* during the reign of Manuel I. Therefore, she was reacting to interpretations of the past prevalent during the time in which she was writing. She also might have projected the existing situation to her father's reign. Consequently, she could have assigned her relatives a more prominent role in the government than that they actually had.¹¹⁶ In this thesis, we will tackle these hypotheses to find out the role of the imperial relatives in the government and in the opposition during Alexios' reign.

As Leonora Neville recently affirmed, Anna Komnene was pressured by two expectations while writing her *Alexiad*: as a historian, she could not indulge herself in eulogizing her father and, as the emperor's daughter, she was supposed to show reverence towards her progenitors.¹¹⁷ This reverence was clearly extended to her paternal and maternal family. She makes clear efforts to highlight the family's unity as well as to understate conflicts, depicting Alexios as constantly encircled by allies and family members.¹¹⁸ Therefore, Anna Komnene denies that Alexios had any plans of

¹¹⁴ Kouroupou/ Vannier, *Commémoraisons*, pp. 55f; Papachryssanthou, *La date*, pp. 250–255; Rigo, *Il processo*, pp. 194–200.

¹¹⁵ The *Regesten der Kaiserurkunden* establishes a date before 1103. Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, Nr. 1220. In a meeting between the Emperor Alexios I and Kyrillos Phileiotes, the saint refers to this institution while mentioning the Byzantine victory over the Petchenegs in 1091. Kyrillos could have mentioned an old event, but there is a chance that the emperor decided to reform and inaugurate the orphanage once again in consequence of his victory against the Petchenegs and the saint was praising the emperor for both deeds, see Nicholas Kataskepenos, *La Vie*, 47, 6–7, pp. 455f; Magdalino, *Innovations*, p. 158; Mamankakis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας*, pp. 70–73; Miller, *The Orphans*, pp. 209–246.

¹¹⁶ Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 1–34; Frankopan, *Re-interpreting*, pp. 181–196; Magdalino, *Pen of the Aunt*, pp. 14–43.

¹¹⁷ Neville, *Anna Komnene*, p. 37.

¹¹⁸ τῶν ἐξ αἵματος καὶ ἀγγιστείας αὐτῶ. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2, xii, 4; 7, iii, 6; 8, i, 1; 8, viii, 3; 9, ix, 1; 9, ix, 2.

divorcing from Eirene Doukaina in order to marry Maria of Alania.¹¹⁹ She mentions that her grandmother Anna Dalassene openly and strongly disliked the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas and his entire family when she deals with the troubled issue of Eirene Doukaina's crowning.¹²⁰ She very likely has done it because Nikephoros Bryennios had already emphasized this grudge in his work and it therefore would have been strange if she had not mentioned it at all.¹²¹ Naturally, this aversion had further impact in the reign of her son, given Anna Dalassene's influence, but Anna Komnene does not mention it again. Moreover, it is noticeable that whenever an emperor's relative was involved with Alexios' opponents, Anna Komnene uses her narrative skills to understate the relationship between Alexios' relatives and problematic figures, such as Ioannes Italos, Leon of Chalcedon, or the rebel Nikephoros Diogenes.¹²² She constantly "forgets" the names of people involved in conspiracies against her father.¹²³ Furthermore, she less often mentions conspirators by naming individuals, but rather reports collectively that a great number of officials, senators, or bureaucrats took part in the conspiracies, or by mentioning secret murmuring and whispering.¹²⁴ To sum up, Anna Komnene makes every effort to portray Alexios Komnenos as a very successful ruler. In order to achieve this, she tries to legitimize her father's policies by concealing their unwelcome consequences and, when it was impossible to hide them, she portrays her father's problems and failures in such way that she never casts a negative shadow on Alexios. She often reports her father's mistakes as successes.¹²⁵

One last aspect to be highlighted in the *Alexiad* is the patience Alexios practiced towards his internal enemies and conspirators. In the chapter dedicated to the imperial reaction to political opposition, we will examine the reasons for this behaviour. It is noticeable that Anna Komnene depicts her father as being very mild and forgiving to his internal enemies. Alexios I allowed likely enemies to live in Constantinople and nobody was condemned to death for political offense during his reign. Anna Komnene describes

¹¹⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, i–ii.

¹²⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ii, 1.

¹²¹ Here I contradict the recent hypothesis put forward by Vilimonović. According to her, Anna mentioned her grandmother's dislike towards the Doukai in order to criticize her father for allowing his mother to have such influential role in his government. This strangely contradicts another proposal by this author, for she states that Anna Dalassene served for Anna Komnene as a model of feminine political agency, Vilimonović, *Structures*, pp. 286–288 (Anna Dalassene as bad influence) and pp. 284f (Anna Dalassene as role model).

¹²² Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, pp. 251–256.

¹²³ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, p. 279, n. 7.

¹²⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 4, iv, 1; 5, ii, 5; 6, iii; 12, iv.

¹²⁵ Neville, *Anna Komnene*, p. 47f.

him as being against physical punishments such as blinding. The times when Alexios I demanded violent punishments – as the blinding of Nikephoros Diogenes and Katakalon Kekaumenos and the burning of the Bogomil leader Basileios – were exceptional. In some cases, Anna Komnene reports confiscations and imprisonments. However, they were often reversed.¹²⁶

i.iii.iii The *Epitome Historion* of Ioannes Zonaras

Ioannes Zonaras was *protoasekretis* and *mezas droungarios* of the watch, as well as a canonist and law scholar in the 12th century, who made his career during the reign of Alexios I. Sometime towards the end of Alexios I's reign or afterwards, Zonaras retired to St. Glykeria monastery and adopted the name Ioannes. His historiographic work is mostly a summary of other works.¹²⁷ The date of composition of his work is difficult to pinpoint. Herbert Hunger and Iordanis Gregoriadis defend its composition in the reign of Manuel I as a possible reaction to the eulogistic narratives by Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene.¹²⁸ Thomas Banchich suggests an earlier date: the reign of Ioannes II Komnenos.¹²⁹ Banchich's hypothesis is more plausible, for Zonaras would have included a chapter on Ioannes II otherwise.

Only the account of Alexios Komnenos's reign is fully original. The most valuable aspect of Zonaras' description is the material he provides on the internal issues of the Komnenos-Doukas faction, which can be used to counterbalance the image of family harmony, disrupted only by isolated events, created by Anna Komnene. According to Zonaras, Alexios Komnenos was not pleased with the influence of his mother¹³⁰; Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas were slowly pushed aside although Alexios's association with the *porphyrogenetos* Konstantinos Doukas gave legitimacy to his seizure of power¹³¹; and the relationship between the emperor and his wife Eirene Doukaina was not the love-story reported by their daughter, for they had difficulties at the beginning of their marriage due to Alexios's infidelities, among other things.¹³² Zonaras tells of Eirene Doukaina's dislike of her own son Ioannes Komnenos

¹²⁶ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, pp. 89–87; Dias, *A reação imperial*, pp. 111–137.

¹²⁷ In this thesis, the edition by Theodor Büttner-Wobst will be used. The translation to German by Erich Trapp will be consulted. For a full reference, consult bibliography.

¹²⁸ Grigoriadis, *Linguistic and Literary Studies*, pp. 17f; Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 416–418

¹²⁹ Bachin/ Lane, *The History of Zonaras*, p. 7.

¹³⁰ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 746.

¹³¹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 733.

¹³² Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 747.

and of her attempt to influence her husband to choose Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios instead of Ioannes Komnenos. Zonaras also recounts how Ioannes Komnenos tried to overcome his mother's conspiracies in order to confirm his rightful place as Alexios's successor.¹³³

His disapproval of the patrimonial regime established by Alexios I and the emperor's treatment of senators is widely known. Therefore, Tinnefeld considered him a representative of the senatorial class that lost position under Alexios' rule.¹³⁴ Yet Zonaras' criticism is much more than mere complaints by a member of a disempowered social group. Cyril Mango discovered a potential link between a certain Naukratios Zonaras and Gregorios Taronites. Since Naukratios held also the title of *droungarios* of the watch and was in the monastery of Glykeria almost at the same time as the historian Ioannes Zonaras, Mango considers it possible that Naukratios could be identified as being either the author Ioannes Zonaras or Nikolaos Zonaras, who was also *droungarios* of the watch in 1088. Due to the chronological information the notice gives, Gregorios Taronites cannot be other than the rebel *doux* of Trebizond.¹³⁵ This connection of the Zonaras family with the Taronitai, a family linked with the Komnenoi by marriage, but whose members had a complicated relationship with their imperial in-laws, opens new possibilities of understanding Zonaras' criticisms towards the Komnenian rule that goes beyond some general expressions of group feelings.¹³⁶

His criticism also illustrates how Zonaras and others understood the functions of the Byzantine state and imperial power. Moreover, in his account of Alexios's reign, Zonaras provides information about the conspiracies against Alexios Komnenos though they are very abridged compared to Anna Komnene. The *Epitome Historion* is therefore a valuable source not only for events ignored or misreported by Anna Komnene but also

¹³³ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 748–762.

¹³⁴ Magdalino, *Kaiserkritik*, pp. 326–246; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, p. 144. Kaldellis compared Zonaras' criticism to Alexios' reign with the senatorial criticism of the first Roman emperors. In both cases, authors lamented the death of the Republic. Therefore, Kaldellis asserted that those complaints were expressions of social strata that lost privileges in both regime changes, see Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, pp. 32–61.

¹³⁵ A notice from the Glykeria Monastery, where Ioannes Zonaras retired and wrote his work, informs us that the monk Naukratios Zonaras, who once was *droungarios*, convinced a certain Gregorios Taronites *protovestiaros* to reform the monastery. Cyril Mango rejects the possibility that the Gregorios Taronites reported in the notice was the same Gregorios Taronites appointed *protovestiaros* by Ioannes II Komnenos in 1118. In Mango's opinion, it would be too late. Gregorios Taronites from the notice could only have become monk until 1110. Therefore, Mango considers Gregorios Taronites, the failed rebel of 1105, as the most likely candidate. Stratos Nikolaros does not exclude the possibility, but the question of the identity of this Gregorios Taronites is still open, see Grigoriadis, *Linguistic and Literary Studies*, p. 22; Mango, *Twelfth-Century Notices*, pp. 221–228; Nikolaros, *Die Taronitai*, p. 266.

¹³⁶ On the Taronites-Komnenos relations, see Ch. 4.1.2.2 and 5.2.

for the ideological guidelines rejected by the Komnenoi that have legitimized expressions of political opposition to Alexios I. It also presents a counterpoint to Anna Komnene's effort to present an image of a unified family and Alexios as an omniscient and omnipotent emperor.

i.iii.iv The *Chronike Diegesis* of Niketas Choniates

As with the *Material for History* written by Nikephoros Bryennios, and Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*, Niketas Choniates' composition of his chronicle was a long process.¹³⁷ It began at the end of the 12th century and ended some years after the sack of Constantinople by the crusaders in 1204. Hence, the main question that featured in his work was what went wrong for the Byzantines and caused the disaster of the Fourth Crusade. Choniates was intelligent and well trained in rhetoric and composed a balanced and very critical narrative of the reigns between 1118 and 1206.¹³⁸ In his search for the causes of the disaster in 1204, Choniates blames the Komnenoi and the Angeloi's branch of the family, holding them responsible for the decadence of the Empire. In Magdalino's view, Choniates' criticism of the Komnenoi is the result of his social position as a member of a second-class aristocracy debarred from most prominent positions.¹³⁹

Choniates introduces the reign of Ioannes Komnenos by giving an account of Alexios' last years. According to Choniates and in agreement with Zonaras, while Eirene Doukaina praised her son-in-law, Nikephoros Bryennios, to her husband, she forced Alexios to dismiss Ioannes Komnenos on account of his moral weaknesses. Although Alexios points out the absurdity of an emperor appointing his son-in-law as his successor, while having a perfectly apt son, the emperor generally keeps his opinions to himself, behaving ambiguously towards Eirene. Choniates recounts the steps Alexios took to ensure his succession, as does Zonaras, and gives also an account of the conspiracy to murder Ioannes II, which Anna Komnene and her supporters organized. To Anna Komnene's discontentment, it fails due to the lack of support by

¹³⁷ In this thesis, the edition by Jean-Louis van Dieten will be used with the support of the translation to German by Franz Gabler and to English by Harry J. Magoulias. For full references, check bibliography.

¹³⁸ On Niketas Choniates and his work, Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 430–441; Simpson, *Niketas Choniates*, passim; Lilie, *Niketas*, pp. 89–101.

¹³⁹ Magdalino, *Kaiserkritik*, pp. 335–338; Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 14.

Bryennios. After the failure of the plot, Ioannes II punishes his sister with imprisonment and loss of property, pardoning her shortly afterwards in a public reconciliation.¹⁴⁰

Leonora Neville contests the veracity of this episode reported by Choniates. In her *Anna Komnene: The Life and Work of a Medieval Historian*, the author has two main hypotheses, one very convincing and another not equally convincing. She states that, for the Byzantines, the historiography was an essentially masculine activity since it concerned war and politics and emphasized the author's personal experience as a witness of the reported acts. Therefore, Anna Komnene risked being judged as an immodest woman who trespassed against the boundaries established for her gender by writing a history.¹⁴¹ Moreover, the objectivity expected from a historian demanded that Anna Komnene would also write about her father's failures. This presented her a dilemma: if she only mentioned her father's positive aspects, her credibility as a historian might well be questioned, but if she also dealt with Alexios' errors, she risked censure for not presenting the reverence due to her father.¹⁴²

Neville demonstrates that Anna Komnene employed a number of rhetorical ploys, which were not enough to solve the dilemma entirely, but effective enough to avoid the argumentative collapse of the *Alexiad* on the ground of its own contradictions. Anna Komnene's main artifice of was the use of lamentation whenever she was forced to assert her own intellectual authority. Her aim was to counterbalance any negative impressions of her a Byzantine reader might harbour. According to Neville, it was a normal feminine strategy to appeal to the male condescension. By appealing to feminine frailty, men were coerced into benevolence. In Neville's opinion, Anna Komnene's lamentation in the *Alexiad* served a similar purpose.¹⁴³ Yet they were misinterpreted by modern historians, who based their accounts on Alexios' succession on Zonaras and, principally, Choniates.¹⁴⁴

Neville explains that the account of the murder conspiracy against Ioannes II planned by his sister should not be read as plain truth, but interpreted as a moralist fabrication. It aimed to point to the dysfunctionality of the Komnenos family, which

¹⁴⁰ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*, John2, 4–12.

¹⁴¹ Neville, *Anna Komnene*, pp. 31–42.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 15–42.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 153–174.

was, in Choniates' opinion, one aspect responsible for the decadence that led to the sack of Constantinople in 1204.¹⁴⁵

In this passage, Niketas Choniates intends to emphasize perversion through a gender reversion: the men, Alexios I and Nikephoros Bryennios, adopt a passive and, therefore, feminine position, whilst the women, Eirene Doukaina and Anna Komnene, appear assertive and, accordingly, masculine. Neville hereby lessens the importance of this account, while emphasizing others, such as Georgios Tornikes' eulogy of Anna Komnene and Prodromos' description of the marriage of Anna Komnene's son, who entered the Church with his imperial uncle.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the author denies any evidence of a dysfunctional relationship between Anna Komnene and her imperial brother, likewise with Nikephoros Bryennios. Instead, she creates a new image of a harmonious family, a happy marriage between kindred spirits and of a woman who bypassed the traditional roles of her gender in order to become a respected and influential scholar.

This image may be correct in many aspects, such as Anna Komnene's strategies to bypass the restrictions against higher education for women and her assertion as a respected historian and scholar. However, it seems to me that Neville interprets evidence in order to confirm her own wishful thinking. If Anna's lamentations were empty of content and were solely laments for her widowhood and for the loss of her parents, they would not have any effect on her readers, who were more familiar with her biography than we are. They would have known whether her life was as uneventful as Neville claims. In all probability, this would have made Anna's efforts to appeal to her readers' sympathy ineffective.

It is highly likely that Niketas Choniates colored his account about Alexios I's succession with made up details so to create a negative image of the Komnenoi. Yet it would be reckless to fabricate a murder conspiracy against an emperor by a *porphyrogennetos*, especially considering that Choniates was seeking placement in the Laskaris' court. I believe that the descendants of Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios were still alive and influential enough to react against an entirely invented story about their venerable ancestors. Moreover, such fabrication would taint Choniates' reputation as a historian. One thing is creating harmless anecdotes or fictional speeches; another is inventing a conspiracy to murder the emperor by his own sister. It goes beyond any traditional effort to characterization present in Byzantine historiographic

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 102–112.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 113–133.

tradition. Instead of entirely disbelieving Choniates' account, it is possible to interpret it together with the accounts by Zonaras and by Anna Komnene as a reflection of the troubled succession.¹⁴⁷ Even though Choniates could possibly have included fabricated details to delineate the role of each character in the episode more clearly, the conspiracy itself and at the least the suspicion concerning Anna Komnene's involvement can hardly be discarded as a fabrication.

i.iii.v The Non-Historiographical Sources

In addition to historiographical sources, the political struggles in the times of Alexios I were covered by different types of sources, being the imperial speeches (*basilikoi logoi*) contemporary sources of primary importance. According to the models established by Menander of Laodicea, which exerted a strong influence over Byzantine rhetoric, the imperial speech was a form of *enkomion*.¹⁴⁸ They praised the emperor's origin, his physical appearance, his deeds, and his virtues as a wise and humane ruler.¹⁴⁹ Elisabeth Jeffreys states that the *Vita Constantini* established the models of imperial virtues in Byzantium. Since the *basilikoi logoi* could be used to praise and advise rulers, some samples of this genre were considered as a sort of mirror of princes although the use of this concept can be controversial.¹⁵⁰ Since they were written and/or presented to emperors, one might think that the *basilikoi logoi* are not an adequate source for a study of political opposition. Yet Margaret Mullett demonstrates that there was a place for criticism in the imperial speeches even if conveyed indirectly.¹⁵¹

The era of Alexios I was particularly fruitful for imperial speeches.¹⁵² His reign actually marked the beginning of a rhetorical tradition, which blossomed under the sponsorship of his son and grandson. For this particular study, the most "political" imperial speeches will be examined: two composed by Theophylaktos of Ohrid,¹⁵³ two by Manuel Straboromanos,¹⁵⁴ and another two by Ioannes Oxeites, patriarch of

¹⁴⁷ In this issue, I agree with Vilimonović, *Structure*, p. 68.

¹⁴⁸ Russel/ Wilson, *Menander Rhetor*, pp. xi–xlvi.

¹⁴⁹ Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 65–75, 120–133.

¹⁵⁰ Jeffreys, *Rhetoric*, pp. 173f. On *Mirror of Princes*, Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 157–165; Odorico, *Les miroirs*, pp. 223–246; Prinzing, *Beobachtungen*, pp. 1–31; Reinsch, *Bemerkungen*, pp. 404–419.

¹⁵¹ Mullett, *How to criticize the laudandus*, pp. 247–262.

¹⁵² Mullett, *The Imperial Vocabulary*, pp. 359–397.

¹⁵³ See fn. 161 and 162 below.

¹⁵⁴ Gautier, *Le dossier*, pp. 168–204.

Antioch.¹⁵⁵ These speeches in particular were chosen because of the content of their writings and their author's relationship with the emperor.

Theophylaktos of Ohrid was the *master of rhetoric*, but sometime between 1088 and 1092, he was appointed to the Archbishopric of Ohrid, which he viewed as a kind of exile.¹⁵⁶ Before and after his appointment, Theophylaktos was very close to important members of the imperial dynasty, including Maria of Alania, to whose son he gave a speech, Nikephoros Bryennios, both the senior and junior, Gregorios Taronites, and Ioannes Komnenos, the son of the *sebastokrator* Isaakios.¹⁵⁷ Many of his correspondents were involved in distressful episodes with the Emperor Alexios I.¹⁵⁸ He was also held responsible denouncing Ioannes Komnenos to the emperor, causing the first crisis of the Komnenos family.¹⁵⁹

Whilst a political interpretation of his letters is difficult due to their chronological uncertainty and often enigmatic tone¹⁶⁰, his speeches are easier to date and examine. Theophylaktos of Ohrid composed two imperial speeches: one to the *porphyrogennetos* Konstantinos Doukas sometime between 1085 and 1086,¹⁶¹ and the other to the Emperor Alexios I in the year 1088.¹⁶²

Elements of criticism of Alexios' unbalanced generosity and the voice of the displaced aristocracy can be heard in the speeches of Manuel Straboromanos.¹⁶³ Gautier

¹⁵⁵ Gautier, *Diatribes*, pp. 5–55.

¹⁵⁶ On the date of his nomination, see Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 29–34. Although complaints about being “exiled” in case of appointments to posts outside Constantinople was a common rhetoric *topos* among the members of the Constantinopolitan elites, the feelings expressed by Theophylaktos seemed to be true, Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 259

¹⁵⁷ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae, Letters to Ioannes Komnenos* (10, pp.160f; 11, pp. 161–165; 12, pp. 166–169; 19, pp. 194f; 22, pp. 202–205; 23, pp. 206f; 24, pp. 208–211; 26, pp. 214–217; 61, pp. 350f), Nikephoros Bryennios, senior (86, pp. 452–455; 105, pp. 520f), the *kaisar* Nikephoros Bryennios (96, p. 482–293), Gregorios Taronites (65, pp. 362f; 78, pp. 414–417; 81, pp. 426–433; 92, pp. 472–475), and Maria of Alania (4, pp. 136–141; 107, pp. 524f).

¹⁵⁸ Besides the already mentioned Ioannes Komnenos, the *sebastokrator's* son, Gregorio Taronites and Maria of Alania, Theophylaktos sent letters to Adrianos Komnenos (5, pp. 142–145; 79, pp. 418–423; 85, pp. 444–451; 89, pp. 464–467; 98, pp. 498–505) and Nicholas Anemas (32, pp. 236–239; 34, pp. 242f; 41, pp. 268f.). Was the latter a relative or one of the Anemas brothers who conspired to kill Alexios around the year 1100? See Ch. 4.3.

¹⁵⁹ Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 213; On the role of letters and written word in the Byzantine political process, see Holmes, *Literacy*, pp. 137–149.

¹⁶⁰ This enigmatic aspect of Theophylaktos' letters was once considered a result of the rhetorical affectation of the Byzantine elite. However, Mullett proposes a more practical reason: protection of the sender and receiver of the missives in the case the letter fell in strange hands. The message of the letters was often to be “decoded” or explained in wider terms by its carrier, normally a trusted person. Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, pp. 17f.

¹⁶¹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 48–67. On this speech, Ch. 3.4.3.

¹⁶² Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 68–96.

¹⁶³ Gautier, *Le dossier*, pp. 168–204.

considers it plausible that Manuel Straboromanos was the son of Romanos Straboromanos, a faithful supporter of Nikephoros III Botaneiates who led efforts to repress the revolt of the Komnenoi. This would explain the financial and political distress experienced by his family during his childhood.¹⁶⁴ According to Straboromanos account, he was able to acquire higher education and enter the imperial service. However, Straboromanos must have felt that his career was not advancing as he wished, so he sent a speech – he did not hold it in front of the emperor – praising Alexios’s generosity and philanthropy, but complaining that these have not reached him. After Manuel Straboromanos sent a second speech, asking whether the emperor had received the first, Alexios shortly answered that he had received his letters and that they were beautifully written. There is no word about Straboromanos’ complaints.

Among the speeches addressed to Alexios Komnenos, Ioannes Oxeites reserved the harshest words for the emperor. Oxeites composed two works to emperor Alexios. Paul Gautier, who edited, translated and commented these works, accepted that the longer work was composed first and the shorter one was a sort of follow up to the issues Oxeites dealt with in the longer one.¹⁶⁵ Recently, Judith Ryder convincingly argued that the shorter work might have been composed before the longer one. The shorter “speech” could have been a sort of application sent to the emperor for the position of Patriarch of Antioch. Hence, the longer work could have been a development of the subjects tackled in the shorter text and might have been commissioned by the emperor himself.¹⁶⁶

Since it is longer and refers to historical events, the longer speech is easier to date. It was composed on early 1091 because Ioannes Oxeites mentions the loss of Chios and Mitylene, the rebellions in Crete and Cyprus, the advance of the Petchenegs, and pirate activities by the Turkish emir Tzachas.¹⁶⁷ The latter controlled Smyrna and several islands in the Aegean Sea. Holding these positions, Tzachas declared himself emperor and allied with the Petchenegs, aiming to conquer Constantinople.¹⁶⁸ So the events depicted by Oxeites refer to the months before the great victory at Levounion in April 1091, when the Petcheneg menace was entirely neutralized; also before the expulsion of Tzachas from the Aegean islands by the forces under Ioannes Doukas, the

¹⁶⁴ Gautier, *Le dossier*, p. 172.

¹⁶⁵ Gautier, *Diatribes*, pp. 5f, 15f.

¹⁶⁶ Ryder, *The Role of Speeches*, pp. 93–115.

¹⁶⁷ Gautier, *Diatribes*, p. 35. 3–6.

¹⁶⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 7, viii. Alexander Beihammer agrees that Tzachas adopted the imperial title, see Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, p. 273.

megas doux, commander-in-chief of the Byzantine fleet, at the beginning of the following year.¹⁶⁹

On account of his severe words, Ioannes Oxeites is often considered a representative of the opposition to Alexios I, but his biography shows that he was very close to the Komnenoi.¹⁷⁰ He was a fairly obscure monk with a confrontational personality until he was appointed patriarch of Antioch in September 1089.¹⁷¹ He was also known for his treatise about bad conditions in monastic institutions and against the *charistikia*. These were concessions of administrative rights over monasteries granted often to wealthy lay personalities.¹⁷²

His quick accession to one of the most important posts of the Christian church seems surprising, but there is an indication of an earlier connection with the Komnenos family. In a letter to the Synod, Oxeites dedicates a eulogy to Anna Dalassene, the emperor's mother, and mentions his admiration for her.¹⁷³ Evidently, he had some kind of connection with the "mother of all the Komnenoi". Oxeites may have been part of the group of monks sponsored by her. This hypothesis is viable because it is known that this circle existed, that she was always eager to be introduced to new monks¹⁷⁴ and that one of its members had already been chosen for another chief post in the Church: Eustratios Garidas, the patriarch of Constantinople, who replaced Kosmas in May 1081.¹⁷⁵

Alexios I appointed Ioannes Oxeites to a key post, the Patriarchate of Antioch, whose holder was personally appointed by the Byzantine emperor ever since the city

¹⁶⁹ Gautier, *Défection*, pp. 215–227.

¹⁷⁰ Positions in favor of classifying Oxeites as a member of the opposition to Alexios I, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 361; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnene*, p. 13; Stankovic, *Komnini u Carigradu*, p. 312.

¹⁷¹ On Ioannes Oxeites, see Beck, *Kirche*, p. 613; Gautier, *Jean V l'Oxite, patriarche*, pp. 128–157; Kazhdan, Alexander, "John IV (V) Oxeites", in: Kazhdan, *ODB*, 2, p. 1049; Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat, (969–1204)*, pp. 702–721; Todt/ Vest, *TIB: Syria*, 15/1, pp. 355–356, 618–620.

¹⁷² Gautier, *Réquisitoire*, pp. 77–132; About the *charistikia*, see Angold, *Church*, pp. 63–69; Bartusi, Mark C., Art. "Charistikarion", in: Kazhdan, *ODB*, 1, pp. 412f; Morris, *Monks and Layman*, pp. 167–275; Prinzing, Art. "Charistikarier", in: Kasper (ed.), *LThK*, 2, p. 1023; Thomas, *Private Religious Foundations*, pp. 149–213, 276–279.

¹⁷³ Gautier, *Jean V l'Oxite*, p. 156: Σφόδρα ἐγὼ θαυμάζω τὴν μητέρα τῶν βασιλέων· κατενόησα γὰρ ἐν αὐτῇ φρόνημα μὲν ὑπερφυῶς ἀνδρεῖον, ἦθος δὲ εὐσταθὲς διαφερόντως καὶ πεπηγὸς καὶ ψυχῆς παράστημα τοιοῦτον ἦν μήτε ἐν λυπηροῖς εὐένδοτον μήτε ἐν τοῖς χρηστοτέροις φαίνεσθαι διαχεόμενον, ἐν ὁμιλίαις εὐσύνετος, ἐν τοῖς περὶ Θεοῦ καὶ θείοις ἐμμελής τε καὶ ἔμπειρος, ἐν προσευχαῖς ἄγρυπνος, ἐν διαίτῃ ἀπέριττος, ἐν πᾶσι νήφουσα. (Certainly, I admire the mother of emperors, for I consider the spirit in her enormously brave and her customs especially well-grounded and solid; the inspiration of the soul hence is neither easily yielding in painful moments nor dispersed when better things happened, but rather intelligent in instruction, skilled and harmonious concerning holy matters and God, sleepless in prayers, plain in way of life and sober in everything). Klaus-Peter Todt had already noticed this praise as a sign of connection with the imperial family, see Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat, (969–1204)*, p. 702.

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas Kataskepenos, *La vie*, 17, p. 314–317.

¹⁷⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 3, ii, 7.

was reconquered in 969. Antioch was of strategic importance to the Byzantine Empire although politically unstable and prone to revolts against imperial authority.¹⁷⁶ The loyalty of the patriarch became even more important considering the conditions of the time, with the city under Turkish control since 1084.¹⁷⁷ The patriarch was accordingly the imperial representative among enemies, and Oxeites held this post under duress, for he was even tortured by the Turks during the crusaders' siege because they suspected that he was a spy. In 1100, the crusaders accused him of being an imperial agent conspiring to yield the city to the emperor. For this reason, he was then released from his post.¹⁷⁸ Consequently, his connections with the imperial house, the faith deposited in him by the emperor and the duress which Oxeites endured during his time as the patriarch make it difficult to defend that Ioannes Oxeites was a political opponent of Alexios I.

The survey of the sources on political opposition in the time of Alexios I Komnenos above includes only the most important or problematic sources which needed clarification concerning certain aspects, but it is not complete. Particular issues will be assessed more deeply in the course of the study. Moreover, there are other sources as yet unmentioned, which will be assessed in the analysis. Their singularities and potential problems will be considered. One example is non-Byzantine sources on Alexios I's reign which although they provide information about internal politics in Byzantium, tend to be worse informed than the Byzantine sources. We cannot exclude them from the analysis, for they might provide important information if read with caution.

In the following chapters, the opposition to Alexios I will be the centre of our attention. In general terms, the internal economy of this dissertation follows the chronological sequence of the events. Yet this approach poses challenges, for there are many uncertainties as to when specific events took place; some oppositional expressions and movements superposed one another chronologically; some groups or individuals are found in various contexts with different roles; and there are movements and tendencies that existed for longer periods or during his entire reign. These aspects make it difficult

¹⁷⁶ An example is the period in which Isaakios Komnenos was *doux* of Antioch, see Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 28–29, pp. 200–206.

¹⁷⁷ On the political situation of Antioch at the end of 11th century: Todt/ Vest, *TIB 15/1: Syria*, pp. 571–576; Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat (969–1204)*, pp. 702–721; Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat (969–1084)*, pp. 239–267.

¹⁷⁸ On Oxeites's presence in Antioch, see Gautier, *Jean V l'Oxite*, pp. 131–133; Jeffreys et al, *PBW, Ioannes 4003*; Todt/ Vest, *TIB 15/1: Syria*, pp. 355–356, 618–620.

to clearly delineate chronological blocks. Therefore, I will propose a periodization capable of assembling common aspects of various moments of the political struggles during Alexios Komnenos' reign.

The first two chapters are dedicated to the years preceding the seizure of power by Alexios I. The time between the death of Basileios II (976-1025) and the rise of the Komnenoi is the subject of the first chapter. This period was marked by increasing political instability, which happened simultaneously with a stronger economic prosperity and stronger cultural dynamism. Politically, some aspects contributed to the instability of the period: lack of legitimacy of the emperors reigning after the end of the Macedonian Dynasty (867-1056), the aristocratic hegemony in Byzantine politics, and foreign invasions. The political careers of the *genoi* Komnenos and Doukas are the subjects of the second chapter, which presents how their ascendancy was simultaneously the result of the context in which they lived and of the political acumen of the family members.

The third chapter deals with the first ten years of Alexios' reign, a period of uncertainty, in which the newly established regime lacked strength and legitimacy; a time of diffuse opposition, and hesitant support. The new ruling group faced many challenges caused by controversial way the Komnenos-Doukas alliance took power by letting their troops ransack Constantinople, as well as by the sequence of military defeats by the hands of the Normans and the Petchenegs. Moreover, there were disputes and conflicting ambitions within the new Komnenian consortium that risked its existence.

The years between the Battle of Levounion in 1091 facing the Petchenegs and the Synod of Blachernae in 1095 are the subject of the fourth chapter. The decisive military victory over the Petchenegs helped Alexios I to secure his position, which allowed him to crown his son Ioannes Komnenos in 1092 as presumptive heir. These events created the perspective of not only a long reign, but also the rise of a new imperial dynasty. A clear line between opposition and dissidence was drawn. Coincidentally, we observe in this period the most dangerous conspiracies that Alexios had to face during his reign; relatives and former allies were implicated in some of them. In this chapter, these events are analysed within the framework of the power struggles in previous periods and of the Byzantine political culture. In the meanwhile, the First Crusade arrived in Constantinople in 1096. This event not only forced a recalibration of Alexios' foreign policy but also influenced Byzantine internal politics.

The Synod of Blachernae marks the end of this period because it finally gave a closure to the controversy around Leo, the bishop of Chalcedon, which was the main point of discord within the Komnenos-Doukas ruling group. After almost fifteen years in power and the defeat of his most dangerous internal adversaries, Alexios I was able to solve this issue and recast his alliance by removing problematic individuals.

The fifth chapter covers the last eighteen years of his reign. Alexios had long been installed on the throne and crowned his older son as presumptive successor. In the previous years, the most important internal struggles within the Komnenos-Doukas ruling group had been settled. Since this period was indeed politically calmer than the earlier years, this chapter also includes provincial manifestations of resistance to the imperial power in Constantinople. It is possible to observe how Alexios tried to use the same strategies he used to co-opt adversaries within the main aristocratic groups of the capital with the local elites with mixed results.

The discursive strategies of the opposition to Alexios and his regime are analysed in the sixth chapter. In the eleventh-century Byzantium, there was a lively debate on forms of government, as well as on how and for whom the emperor should rule. These discussions did not end when Alexios I became emperor in 1081, as observed by the innovations in the administration and delegation of power he implemented. Moreover, Alexios and his supporters made efforts to legitimate his rule and face opposition using discursive tools. We see how Alexios carefully projected his image to face the criticisms to his regime, to present himself as an ideal emperor according to Byzantine traditional models and to defuse potential crises among his supporters.

1. The background of Alexios I Komnenos' reign (1042–1081)

The reign of Alexios I encompasses the last stage of trends and historical processes begun in previous decades. Accordingly, it is relevant to assess some of these developments before dealing with the political struggles during the reign of Alexios. In this chapter, two important issues will be discussed: the Byzantine aristocracy and the political disputes before 1081. Unquestionably, the assumption of power by the Komnenoi marks the completion of the “aristocratization” of Byzantine politics, begun in the 10th century. Consequently, in order to understand Alexios' mindset and his actions as emperor, it is imperative to examine the origins, delimitations, and aspirations of the Byzantine elite. Similarly, in order to understand Alexios' imperial measures and the hostile reactions they sometimes provoked, it is important to assess the policies of former emperors, to consider how they approached the problems faced by the Empire and the dilemmas that these policies created.

1.1 The Role of the Aristocracy in the Middle Byzantine Period

In the Early Byzantine period, there were powerful and rich families such as the Anicii in Constantinople. This lineage had enjoyed an exalted position in the senate for generations and the emperor Anastasios (491–518) was one of its members.¹ The Apiones in Egypt during the 5th and 6th centuries are another example.² Yet the Arab and Slav invasions convulsed economic life in the Byzantine provinces, weakening the urban life and causing the loss of important cities, such as Alexandria and Antioch. Moreover, these invasions also caused the disappearance of the late Roman and early Byzantine aristocracy. An established elite could not be found anymore although the existence of wealth and large estates in the 8th and 9th century can be evidenced in the *Vita* of Saint Philaretos and in the information we have on the widow Danielis.³ Jean-Claude Cheynet affirms that between the 7th and the 9th centuries, the highest offices of the Empire, including the imperial title, were held by a network of people connected or related to one another. Yet the use of family names was not widely established in this

¹ Brandes, *Der Nika-Aufstand*, pp. 239–265.

² Kazhdan, Alexander, Art. “Apion”, in Kazhdan, *ODB*, 1, pp. 130f.

³ Anthony Kaldellis believes that the form how Danielis, a widow who adopted Basileios I, was depicted was a loan from ancient sources by the Byzantine sources. Her figure has many similarities with a queen of the Alexander Romance and Sheba from the Bible. Although Kaldellis agrees that a rich Peloponnesian widow could have adopted Basileios, the particular information given about her cannot be trusted as data for economic history, Danielis, *PmbZ* #21390; Kaldellis, *How the Byzantines Wrote*, p. 298.

era so that the aristocracy in this “dark age” is difficult to trace and for the great part remains hidden.⁴

From the 9th century, individuals with the same surname were appointed to high offices in the imperial apparatus, either in the army or in bureaucracy, or could be found near the emperor. This permits more systematic studies on the aristocracy. In some cases, their kinship is easy to demonstrate because they were fathers and sons, grandfathers and grandsons, uncles and nephews. In other cases, especially when individuals with the same surname are distant chronologically, the relation is harder to demonstrate. The surnames of the Byzantine elite often appeared as nicknames or epithets, according to the offices held (Doukas from *Doux*), personal characteristics (Argyros “the silvery”) or geographical origins (Dalassenos from Dalassa). Later, their descendants adopted these sobriquets and nicknames as surnames because of the fame of their ancestors.⁵

Since laws establishing social stratification in Byzantium did not exist, the historian must work with other sources – mainly historiography and speeches – in order to understand the definitions, divisions, and delineations of the elite. Often the evidence is episodic, indirect, or even contradictory, for authors had varying conceptions of social status.⁶ Comparisons with the feudal nobility are limited and should be made with caution. Wealth, offices, and titles are specific characteristics, but the weight of each one of these criteria varies according to the opinion of different scholars. George Ostrogorsky considers wealth and office as equivalent to the conceptualization of Byzantine aristocracy. He says, “genetically, the Byzantine aristocracy arose from the upper ranks of the services, but its power was determined both by service position and by wealth – especially landed wealth – and it is thanks to this combination that the expansion of the “powerful” proved irresistible. To put it more simply, the “powerful” man was at the same time a landholder and a government official. The central authority was therefore faced with a compact front that was economically the strongest and socially the most influential”⁷.

Holding offices and the bearing title clearly carried significant weight in belonging to the elite. It was possible thereby to enjoy a share of the imperial power

⁴ Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy (8th–13th Centuries)*, pp. 1–43.

⁵ On the origins of the aristocratic surnames, see Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, pp. 12–36; Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L’aristocrazia*, pp. 317–330, 383–391; Nicol, *The Prosopography*, pp. 79–91; Patlagean, *Les débuts*, pp. 23–42; Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 3–6.

⁶ Patlagean, *Les débuts*, p. 24.

⁷ Ostrogorsky, *Observations*, p. 7.

through service, and bearing a title guaranteed access to the senatorial rank. Receiving a court title also meant that its receptor could participate in the palace ceremonial and had access to offices. If the young officer was fortunate enough and in command of a good network, he would be able to have constant access to the emperor himself. Furthermore, titles and offices were connected with stipends (*rogai*), which could surpass the income that landed property normally provided.⁸ Since confiscations were numerous and relatively common, the importance of wealth, chiefly landed wealth, as fundamental for the Byzantine elite must be considered with care. Confiscation was not only a punishment for rebellion or even the suspicion of rebellion but was also used according to the *raison d'état*. Property could be seized to finance the armed forces or to relieve financial difficulties of the state. Estates that lacked heirs and abandoned land could similarly be seized.⁹

Yet the Byzantines resisted. When Attaleiates established his religious and philanthropic foundation, he ensured that the institution he had created would remain intact and free from external influence by warranting the issue of two imperial golden bulls, one by Michael VII and the other by Nikephoros III.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the emperors could simply ignore these protective measures. Isaakios I Komnenos seized private and ecclesiastical property without considering the golden bulls intended to guard them exactly against imperial appropriation.¹¹ In the opinion of Alexander Kazhdan and Sylvia Ronchey, this is enough evidence to affirm that, in the last instance, land belonged to the state. In their opinion, the form in which the Byzantine taxation was organized created a relationship of dependence between the Empire and taxpayers. Hence, the emperor had the right to confiscate, transfer and donate private and ecclesiastical property. Moreover, the transmission of property was only valid with imperial authorization.¹² Similarly, the power and influence granted to the aristocrats by

⁸ Kazhdan/ Epstein, *Change*, pp. 56–62; Kazhdan/ Constable, *People and Power*, pp. 51, 135.

⁹ On confiscation of property, see Beck, *Res Publica Romana*, pp. 39–41; Cappel, Andrew J., Art. „Confiscation“ in Kazhdan, *ODB*, 1, p. 494; Cheynet, *Aristocracy and Inheritance*, pp. 30f; Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, pp. 83–85; Neville, *Authority*, pp. 44–46; Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, pp. 153–154. For example, the law issued by Alexios I in 1082 ordered imperial officials to toughen the fiscalizations of private contracts, as wills, so that unauthorized persons could not claim inheritances that was not due to them, enforcing the claims of imperial treasury to inheritances without heirs. A ten percent reward on the value of the inheritance was established by the emperor to the official who would enforce this policy, Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten* nr. 1083. On the function of a chrysobull, as well as on the intention of its authors, Burgmann, *Chrysobull*, pp. 69–92.

¹⁰ Gautier, *Les Diataxis*, pp. 101–124; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1005, 1042.

¹¹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 61; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 939.

¹² Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia*, pp. 178–183. On criticisms to this view, see Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy in the 10th–12th Centuries*, pp. 6f.

their offices and titles were limited, for the emperor had the right to oust anyone from office or to transfer any official to another post. Titles had their worth as long as they provided access to the court. Loss of the emperor's favor could result in the removal of a titleholder.¹³

Considering what was presented above, the conclusion could be that the position of the aristocracy was completely dependent on the whim of the emperor, for he could withdraw position and fortune at any moment, as well as appoint obscure individuals to the highest positions. Yet this conclusion does not correspond to the political and social reality of Byzantium. Confiscation was one of the imperial prerogatives in consequence of the political dispensation that permitted emperors to override the law and even to ignore edicts by former emperors.¹⁴ However, they were always a source of discontentment not only among those affected but also among their contemporaries. Because of the above-mentioned confiscations, Isaakios I Komnenos was hated, quickly lost political support and was forced to abdicate.¹⁵ No emperor tried to continue his confiscation policy. Instead, they generously distributed tax exceptions and wealth in order to gain support.¹⁶ The distribution of titles by the emperors, although an imperial prerogative, was also under aristocratic scrutiny. Michael Psellos defends in a very famous passage that the rational distribution of titles and the correct use of the imperial treasury were essential to the health of the Byzantine state. He made this statement in order to criticize the emperors of his times, who he claims granted titles to unworthy individuals. The rulers, mainly Konstantinos IX Monomachos, brought people directly to the top of the hierarchy without considering the *cursus honorum*.¹⁷ These were, if Psellos is to be believed, “the people from the market.”¹⁸ Here, he means the merchants and artisans, who were rich, but lacked social recognition.¹⁹

¹³ Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, p. 106.

¹⁴ Kaldellis, *Byzantine Republic*, p. 73f.

¹⁵ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 60–62; Beck, *Res Publica Romana*, pp. 39f.

¹⁶ See Ch. 1.2

¹⁷ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, 29: Δύο τοίνυν τούτων τὴν Ῥωμαίων συντηρούντων ἡγεμονίαν, ἀξιομάτων φημι καὶ χρημάτων, καὶ τινος ἔξω τρίτου, ἔμφρονος περὶ ταῦτα ἐπιστασίας· καὶ τοῦ λογισμῶ χρηθῆσθαι περὶ τὰς διανεμήσεις (there are two things that preserve the hegemony of the Romans, I mean the honours and the money, beyond these a third, sensible care concerning them, and use with reason concerning their distribution).

¹⁸ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, V.16, VI.29.

¹⁹ Laiou/ Morrison, *Byzantine Economy*, pp. 140–142; Cheynet, *Le poids politiques*, pp. 129–144.

Nikephoros Bryennios, who was even more conscious of social status than Psellos, condemns the Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates in similar terms.²⁰ He says, “there are two reasons due to which the Empire of the *Romaioi* was praised: it gave the distinctions to the best ones and to those who at the same time contribute [to the state] with goodwill, [but] he [Nikephoros III] extended both of them and began therefore to bath everyone with luxurious gifts, for he conferred the highest distinctions not to the best, the soldiers and to those who came from the head of the senate, not also to the ones who contribute [to the state] with goodwill, but to everyone who asked.”²¹ Skylitzes Continuatus expresses a similar position towards Nikephoros III’s generosity and reports the senator’s disapproval of his policies and his decision to elevate Borilos and Germanos.²² This aversion to perceived arbitrary distribution of titles is evidence that the titles not only granted social position but also confirmed an already existent elevated status or a contribution to the well-being of the state. Finally, the generous policies of the emperors compromised the affirmative effect of the court titles, forcing its substitution by a wholly new hierarchy at the end of the 11th century.²³

This immaterial sense of status confirmed by the granting of titles and offices meant that power was not primarily based on wealth, access to title, or offices, but in social influence resulting from networks built on kinship, marriage connections or political alliances. While belonging to these networks and therefore being part of the elite granted access to titles and offices as well as wealth, their possession was a key factor in the maintenance of the networks and the self-identification of the elite. It was a circle, which could easily be broken by political instabilities. For this reason, most Byzantine lineages did not survive for more than a few generations. Families traced over centuries were exceptional and generally connected with the military.

Because of the influence these networks had over the apparatus of the Byzantine Empire and the zeal of their members in defending their position, emperors had no

²⁰ On the aristocratic self-awareness in the *Material for History* see, Howard-Johnston, Anna Komnene, pp. 260–302; Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 394–400; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 148–152.

²¹ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 1, pp. 256–259: Δυσὸν γὰρ ὄντοι πόροι ἐξ ᾧ ἡ βασιλεία Ῥωμαίων τὰ μέγιστα ἐσεμνύετο ὀχρηγοῦσα τὰ γέρα τοῖς ἀρστεύουσι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλως εὖνοιαν συνεισφέρουσιν, ἄμφω τοῦτους ἀναστομώσας τοῖς πᾶσι προῖκα ἐκεῖθεν ἀρδεύεσθαι δαυιλῶς ἐχορήγησε· τῶν τε γὰρ ἀξιομάτων τὰ μέγιστα οὐκ ἀριστεῦσι καὶ στρατιώταις καὶ τοῖς ἐκ τῆς συγκλήτου βουλῆς καταγομένοις πεφιλοτίμητο οὐδὲ τοῖς εὖνοιάν τινα συνεισφέρουσιν, ἀλλὰ παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι.

²² Skylitzes Continuatus, 185f.

²³ On the workings of the court titles as well as its crisis in the 11th century, see Angold, *Belle Époque*, pp. 583–627; Cheynet, *Dévaluation*, pp. 453–477; Cheynet, *Le redistribution*, pp. 241–255; Neville, *Authority*, pp. 14–31; Pratsch, *Ämterkauf in Byzanz?*, pp. 221–240.

choice but to form his inner circle from the offspring of the same influential and powerful families. Even “anti-aristocratic” emperors such as Basileios II could only defeat an aristocratic party with the help of other aristocratic groups. Careers in the army and in the administration were thereby advanced and fortunes built.²⁴

The emperors had to cope with various elite groups, thus the success of a ruler could be measured by how well he managed them in his own interest. In order to describe the exercise of power in Byzantium better, I repeat the words of Hans-Georg Beck. Concerning Byzantine constitutional history, he states, “the Byzantine Empire is absolutistic when it can afford the luxury”.²⁵ This statement epitomizes the notion that emperors had to cope with different social and economic conditions so that they could not simply impose their will. On the contrary, they were forced to negotiate with opposing parties and opinions and to reach compromises while at the same time the image of imperial omnipotence had to be maintained by the ruler and his subjects.²⁶ The possibility of rebelling against the emperor and deposing him has always existed. The ideological mechanisms necessary to depose an emperor were discussed above, but they were not enough for success. For this, financial means and social connections were necessary. Here we can recognize a differentiation in the Byzantine aristocracy.

The Byzantine imperial service offered two paths: the administration and the military. In order to have a successful career in both, it was important to have a well-connected network and financial resources. Günter Weiß, in his study of the numerous letters that Michael Psellos wrote, states that bureaucrats furthered the careers of their *protégées* actively. Psellos himself advanced the careers of his relatives, the sons of his friends and his pupils. His own career was promoted with the help of his contacts. He was brought to court during the reign of Michael IV by Konstantinos Leichoudes, and Psellos, in his turn, introduced Ioannes Xiphilinos and Ioannes Mauropous to the court.²⁷ Novices were normally placed in the retinue of the head of a bureau, who could be his father, brother or uncle. If it was possible, they were introduced to the emperor. The consecutive appearance of the same surnames for the post of the judge of the *velum*

²⁴ Cheynet, *Fortune et Puissance*, pp. 212f; Cheynet, *Aristocracy and Inheritance*, p. 34; Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, p. 191.

²⁵ Beck, *Senat und Volk*, p. 74. My own translation.

²⁶ Beck, *Senat und Volk*. pp. 71–75; Kazhdan/ Constable, *People and Power*, pp. 34–36; Kyritses, *Imperial Council*, pp. 57–69; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 9–120.

²⁷ On the career of Michael Psellos, see Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 63–70; Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 373–383; Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, *passim*.

is a good demonstration of this tactic.²⁸ Money was also essential for promotion in the administration since financial contributions were demanded for entrance to the imperial bureaus.²⁹

A career in the administration permitted the able and the well connected to work near to the emperor and to exert influence over him. Independent of whether the ruler was “civilian” or “military”, the bureaucrats were indispensable in order to conduct the everyday matters of the state. Processes had to be judged and taxes collected. The difference lay in which role these imperial officials occupied in the high politics and the decision-making. The composition of the inner circle of decision-makers is not always easy to determine. Eunuchs were always present around the emperor. Konstantinos IX Monomachos’ inner circle is known because of the wealth of information provided by Psellos. Michael IV, Konstantinos X and Michael VII relied strongly on their relatives. Demetrios Kyritsis proposed the existence of an informal high council that helped the emperor with decisions whose composition he handpicked.³⁰ For a very long time, these urban, highly educated and influential men were classified as “civil aristocracy”. Yet this categorization does not correspond completely with historical reality. The holders of higher posts in the bureaucracy belonged mostly to two groups: they were either individuals from a middle social strata brought to the top of the administration through good education and personal contacts such as Michael Psellos and Ioannes Orphanotrophos. Alternatively, they were descendants of families whose first members appeared in the ranks of the army, but in the 11th century provided their children with excellent education, introducing them into the bureaucracy.³¹

Cheynet argues convincingly that the so-called “civil” families adopted the tradition of bearing and inheriting surnames later than the “military” did. Yet he states that a person cannot be classified as a *homo novus* only because this person is the first known carrier of a certain surname.³² However, the adoption and transmission of surnames were surely symbolic in itself and an important factor in aristocratic representation. Accordingly, the late adoption of this custom by the bureaucracy is understandable, for they were closer to the emperor. Since the adoption of surname meant the affiliation to another group, the *genos*, which required loyalty to it that could

²⁸ On the post of judge of the Vellum, see Cheynet, *Fortune et Puissance*, pp. 212f.

²⁹ Pratsch, *Ämterkauf in Byzanz?*, pp. 221–240.

³⁰ Kyritsis, *Imperial council*, pp. 57–69; Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, pp. 106–126.

³¹ Kazhdan and Ronchey label these families metamorphic, Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L’aristocrazia*, pp. 129–277, see also Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy in the 10th-12th Centuries*, pp. 18–22.

³² Cheynet, *Aristocratic Anthropomy*, pp. 27–30.

perhaps enter into conflict with the allegiance to the emperor, the bureaucrats could have hesitated to adopt this custom in the first place.³³

Those close to the emperor, who helped him with the everyday administration and were awarded court titles and stipends as a result of this proximity, were in constant danger in case of regime change. Their properties could be seized; moreover, they risked being exiled or arrested.³⁴ Attaleiates, a bureaucrat himself and very conscious of this uncertainty, praised the legislation of Nikephoros III that prohibited the mistreatment of those who had served a dead or deposed emperor. According to Nikephoros III's legislation, they could not be exiled or be stripped of their properties or titles without a legal process.³⁵ As a countermeasure, in order to protect their and their descendants' position, high officers and imperial secretaries strove to amount fortunes as well as to assure the integrity of their heritage. Besides landed property, members of the high bureaucracy appear to have invested in a wide spectrum of activities: stores, small-scale industries, ports, money lending, real estate and so on. Furthermore, they took on *charistike*, the administration of monasteries in financial difficulties. Although this institution was created with the well-being of these establishments in mind, some *charistikarioi* took financial advantage of this office.³⁶

Günter Weiß states that the efforts by Attaleiates and Psellos to bequeath their fortune and influence to the next generations failed. The foundation built with Attaleiates' wealth, protected with imperial golden bulls and destined to be under the care of his son disappeared from the sources after his death.³⁷ Weiß suggests that the institution may have been seized by Alexios I in consequence of Attaleiates' connections with Nikephoros III Botaneiates.³⁸ Like Attaleiates, Michael Psellos tried to assure the position of his son-in-law and adoptive daughter through the purchase of the title of *protospatharios* for his son-in-law and the concession of a dowry of 3.600 *nomismata* when both were engaged. These presents did not assure the future of his descendants. Sometime later, a grandson of Michael Psellos is found in the position of a

³³ On the *syngenike boetheia*, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 261–267; On the *genos*, see Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy (8th–13th Centuries)*, p. 18; Cheynet, *Aristocratic Anthroponomy*, p. 9; Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, pp. 41–43; Magdalino, *Honour*, pp. 183–218.

³⁴ Cheynet, *Fortune et Puissance*, pp. 208–212; Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, p. 86.

³⁵ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 316–318; Zepos, *Jus I*, 285–287 and 283–285; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, Nr. 1047. Angeliki Laiou perceives this law as an attempt by Botaneiates of securing the destiny of Borilos and Germanos after his death, see Laiou, *Law*, pp. 151–185, on the law, p. 179.

³⁶ On the sources of the aristocratic wealth, see Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy (8th–13th Centuries)*, pp. 23f; Cheynet, *Le redistribution*, pp. 241–255. On the *charistikia*, see i. Introduction, fn. 172.

³⁷ Gautier, *Les Diataxis*, p. 14; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp. 94–103.

³⁸ Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, p. 153f.

supplicant in a letter of Theophylaktos of Ohrid, who recommended him to Gregorios Kamateros.³⁹ The cases of Psellos and Attaleiates are one of the few known to us, but they allow an insight into the vicissitudes that characterized the destiny of many civil officials in the 11th century. Michael Keroularios, Ioannes Orphanotrophos, Ioannes Xiphilinos, Konstantin Leichoudes, Ioannes Mauropous, Ioannes of Side and Nikephoritzes came from families who, in the middle of the 11th century, could hardly be described as aristocratic, for they could not be found in previous periods. Likewise, their families were not able to extend their power and influence to the following generations, with the exception of the Xyphilinoi, who held offices in the 12th century.⁴⁰ Traditional families such as the Bringas, Kamateros and Makrembolites cannot be ignored, but they seemed to be an exception in the bureaucracy.⁴¹

In the military, we find greater stability. Many lineages first recorded in the army ranks in the 9th and 10th century were still found in the 11th and 12th century and even later: Bourtzes⁴², Bryennios⁴³, Doukas⁴⁴, Komnenos⁴⁵, Skleros⁴⁶, Melissenos⁴⁷, Dalassenos⁴⁸ and Botaneiates⁴⁹ are examples.⁵⁰ Their members are first documented as military commanders at the Western and Eastern frontiers of the Empire. Many of these families were local Armenian, Georgian and Arab dynasties absorbed into imperial service. The Byzantine emperors strove to assure the loyalty of these warlords by granting titles and offices, which integrated them gradually into the Byzantine aristocracy.⁵¹ Kekaumenos recommends – maybe from the experience of his own family

³⁹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 27, pp. 218–221; Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, pp. 153f.

⁴⁰ Kazhdan, Alexander, Art. Xiphilinos in Kazhdan, ODB, 3, p. 2210–2211.

⁴¹ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 249–259; Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia*, pp. 256–302; Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, p. 95.

⁴² Cheynet, *La famille Bourtzes*, pp. 339–341.

⁴³ The Bryennios were an important family in Adrianople in the 11th century, but they are already documented during the regency of Theodora (843–856) by a certain *patrikios* Bryannios, who was related to the Saint Evaristos and acted as an envoy among the Bulgars. Paul Gautier connected this person with the *protospatharios* Theoktistes Bryennios, *strategos* of Hellas, Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, introduction by Paul Gautier, pp. 11–29; Rajković, *The Bryennius*, pp. 151–163.

⁴⁴ Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 1–15.

⁴⁵ On the origins of the Komnenoi, see Ch. 2.2.

⁴⁶ Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, passim.

⁴⁷ Kazhdan, Alexander, Art. Melissenos, in Kazhdan, ODB, 2, p. 1335.

⁴⁸ Cheynet, *Les Dalassénoi*, pp. 413–414.

⁴⁹ Attaleiates provides a praising genealogy of Nikephoros Botaneiates, see Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 229–237, Kazhdan, *Some Notes*, p. 65–80.

⁵⁰ According to Cheynet, the emergence of the military aristocracy took place during the reign of the iconoclast emperors, but the use of surnames was still not common by that time, which makes it difficult to detect their influence, see Ch. 1, fn. 4.

⁵¹ Haldon, *Warfare*, pp 79, 84–85; Kaldellis, *Romanland*, 161–167.

– precaution in the face of imperial generosity. The local ruler, the *toparches*, should never accept presents or dignities from the emperor, for he could risk being seen as a simple server and being despised by the emperor.⁵²

Yet the attraction exerted by the promised wealth and by the court in Constantinople was often too strong to resist. This process explains the rise of the Brachamioi, Pakourianoï and probably the Dalassenoi.⁵³ Moreover, military competence offered the possibility of career promotion until the 9th and 10th centuries. In this manner, the Phokades, Argyroi and the Doukai ascended to the elite.⁵⁴ Besides the frontier wars, the conflicts between the emperor and aristocratic parties also promoted the ascension of new families. Although antagonistic interests between the imperial power and the local aristocracy often resulted in conflict, the emperor depended on his commanders in order to fight external enemies and rebels. In order to face the rebellions of the Phokades and Skleroi, Basileios II promoted the ascension of so-far unknown families, among them the Komnenoi.⁵⁵

Independent of the conditions in which these commanders have risen, they strove as the bureaucrats did but with more success to assure favorable positions for their offspring and relatives. Hence, the same surnames were found in the highest offices of the Byzantine army from the 10th century on. Gradually, the highest offices were closed to new groups. However, new families still emerged in the middle layers of the military hierarchy, promoted by the most important lineages or by imperial support, which tended to promote foreigners with aristocratic background.⁵⁶ The existence of family networks was equally important for the continuity of the military tradition inside particular families. Younger officers were put under the command of relatives as part of their military education and as a prelude to the higher offices they would hold in the future. Nikephoros Bryennios gives an interesting report of the first years of Alexios Komnenos' military career. He was sent to serve under his brother, Isaakios Komnenos,

⁵² Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 76–80.

⁵³ On the Dalassenoi, see Cheynet, Cheynet, *Les Dalassènoi*, pp. 413–471; On the Brachamioi, Cheynet, *Les Brachamioi*, pp. 377–379, Dédéyan, *Les Arméniens*, passim; On the Pakourianoï, see Garsoïan, Nina G., *Art. Pakourianos*, in: Kazhdan, *ODB*, 2. p. 1553.

⁵⁴ On the Phokades, Cheynet, *Les Phocas*, pp. 473–480. On the Argyroi, Cheynet, *Les Argyroi*, 525–526. On the Doukai, Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 1–7.

⁵⁵ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 273, 476–477; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 30–32; Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia*, pp. 141, 223–225; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 38–40.

⁵⁶ Haldon, *Warfare*, pp. 270–274.

during the latter's tenure as *doux* of Antioch. Konstantinos Diogenes, son the former Emperor Romanos IV, was sent too and died in battle.⁵⁷

The above-mentioned stability of these families could be attributed to the strategies they adopted in order to build their estates. Apparently, Byzantine commanders did not have the entrepreneurial spirit of the administrative officials, for their wealth was mostly invested in land.⁵⁸ The fortune of the military commanders granted them influence over the provinces, which in many aspects superposed the imperial authority. As Leonora Neville states, imperial interest in the provinces was limited to the monopoly of violence and taxation. Provinces were let to regulate themselves in many aspects. This meant that local magnates took leading roles and internal conflicts were decided by them. We must ask what the authority of the provincial magnates was based on. Neville says, "authority seems not to have been vested in an aristocratic social status. The people who were described as *archontes* and *dynatoi* were such because they had the support of an effective household, wealth, and the community standing necessary to act authoritatively."⁵⁹ It should be pointed out that Leonora Neville deals in her study with the internal provinces and not the frontier regions. She notices, however, that in those regions besides the two already mentioned concerns, the emperor was also interested in the maintenance of sovereignty in the territories and accordingly in the loyalty of the frontier rulers. Therefore, the emperor's representatives were not to be too strict in order to avoid rebellion.⁶⁰

The resilience of many lineages in specific regions over a long period is strong evidence that they could maintain their areas of influence in spite of participation in failed rebellions and the consequent retaliations by the imperial power.⁶¹ Yet it took a certain time to transform the dominance in the provinces into political influence in Constantinople. Between the 9th century and Isaakios I Komnenos' seizure of power in 1057, no military rebellion was successful. Commanders could prevail if they associated

⁵⁷ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 3–14, pp. 144–167 (For Alexios Komnenos under his brother's orders); II, 29, p. 207 (For Konstantinos Diogenes). Ioannes Doukas, Eirene Doukaina's brother and Alexios Komnenos' brother-in-law, seems to have followed a similar pattern. He was sent to Dyrrachium probably under the command of Georgios Palaiologos, his brother in-law and *doux* of Dyrrachium. On Ioannes Doukas and his stay in Dyrrachium, see pp. 118–120.

⁵⁸ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 207–213; Kazhdan/ Epstein, *Change*, pp. 56–62; Ostrogorsky, *Observations*, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Neville, *Authority*, pp. 136f.

⁶⁰ Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 21; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 379–385; Neville, *Authority*, p. 39.

⁶¹ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 207–245; Cheynet, *Fortune et Puissance* p. 211. At least at the times of the Komnenian emperors, the concessions seemed to be predominant, see Smyrlis, *The Fiscal Revolution*, pp. 593–610; Gerhold, *Empereur, Église et aristocratie laïque*, pp. 76–79.

themselves with the Macedonian dynasty. Romanos I Lakapenos married his daughter to Konstantinos VII.⁶² Nikephoros II Phokas and Ioannes I Tzimiskes married the Empress Theophano.⁶³ Romanos III Argyros was chosen by Konstantinos VIII to marry his daughter Zoe.⁶⁴ Isaakios Komnenos was only successful because he had the support of the most important leaders in Constantinople, but had to abdicate in the moment he lost it.⁶⁵ The estrangement between Constantinople and the provincial elite was attenuated to some extent through a “constantinopolization” of the aristocracy. It was a gradual development, partially constrained by emperors such as Basileios II and Konstantinos IX, who were suspicious of the military officials, and partially put in motion through the provincial elite itself, seeking to be near the central power. Consequently, they began to spend more time in the capital, marrying into families with bureaucratic tradition and holding offices in the administration.⁶⁶ Both the voluntary and the constrained move of aristocratic families from the provinces to the capital had a strong effect on political life in Byzantium. When members of these families took over the imperial power, they began to administer the Empire as they had exerted their authority in the provinces. This development was a long process that peaked when the Komnenoi took the imperial power.

1.2 The Political Conditions during the 11th century

1.2.1 The End of the Macedonian Dynasty and the Legitimacy Crisis

At the political level, the most important turning point for Byzantium in the 11th century was the end of the Macedonian dynasty. After the descendants of Basileios I (867–886) had ruled for almost two centuries, Theodora, the last member of this family, died. She and her sister, Zoe, came to the throne after their father, Konstantinos VIII (1025–1028), died without a son. Consequently, Zoe associated herself by means of marriage and adoption with men who ruled in her name. She was also expected to produce an heir with her husbands, but she was already advanced in age when she married for the first time. With the blessing of the sisters, four emperors reigned: Romanos III Argyros (1028–1034), Michael IV, the Paphlagonian (1034–1041),

⁶² On Romanos I Lakapenos, PmbZ, nr. 26833. For Helene Lakapene, PmbZ, nr. 22574.

⁶³ On Nikephoros II Phokas, PmbZ, nr. 25535. On Ioannes I Tzimiskes, PmbZ, nr. 22778. On Theophano, PmbZ, nr. 28125.

⁶⁴ On Romanos III Argyros, Jeffreys et al, PBW, Romanos 3.

⁶⁵ See above Ch. 1.2.4.

⁶⁶ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 202f; Weiß, *Oströmische Beamte*, pp. 93–95.

Michael V Kalaphates (1041–1042) and finally Konstantinos IX Monomachos (1042–1055). Theodora and Zoe were the legitimacy carriers and important political players in their times. Although female rulers were known in Byzantine history, the traditional position was that the imperial office should be held by men, for the emperor was also the commander-in-chief of the Byzantine armed forces, thus the ruler was supposed to be at least theoretically able to conduct the troops personally. For this reason, it was important that a man should rule, but at the same time, Zoe and Theodora could not be displaced.⁶⁷

Their popularity and support for the dynasty among the people can be observed in two episodes. The first episode was the famous attempt by Michael V Kalaphates to depose Zoe and become the sole ruler in 1042. First, he removed and blinded his relatives. Afterwards, Michael ordered that Zoe's hair should be cut and sent her to a monastery. Michael V's acts outraged the people of the capital, initiating a massive uprising, which finally resulted in his deposition.⁶⁸ The second event happened during a procession to the Church of the Forty Martyrs. On this occasion, someone from the crowd expressed his anger at the position held by Maria Skleraina, Konstantinos IX Monomachos' mistress. He feared that the Empresses Theodora and Zoe might be executed because of her. Thus, he said, "we do not want Skleraina as empress and the *porphyrogenetai* Zoe and Theodora – our mamas – shall not be murdered because of her". Only the Empress Zoe could appease the tumult, as she seemed not to be angry about the fact that her husband openly had a mistress.⁶⁹

On Theodora's deathbed, she appointed Michael Bringas, the *logothetes* of the *stratitikon*, as her successor. This succession symbolized the maintenance of the existing *status quo* of the last years of the Macedonian dynasty. The inner circle around the Emperor Michael VI and the leadership of the imperial army during Isaakios Komnenos' rebellion were, as described by Zonaras and Attaleiates, almost equivalent to the group formed by Zoe, Theodora and the emperors they legitimized. We find the eunuch Theodoros, a member of Theodora's retinue, the *synkellos* Leon Parapondylos,

⁶⁷ On the role of Zoe and Theodora as legitimacy carriers, Dudek, *Pęknięte zwierciadło*, pp. 345–348; Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the Imperial Women*, pp. 53–54; Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, p. 42–58; Runciman, *Women*, pp. 10–22; Todt, *Die Frau als Selbstherrscher*, pp. 138–171. On the treatment of women by the Byzantine historiography, see Neville, *Heroes*, pp. 139–158.

⁶⁸ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, V, 17–51; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 12–17; Krallis, "Democratic" Action, pp. 35–53, especially pp. 38–40; Kaldellis, *How to Usurp*, pp. 52–53; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 122–134.

⁶⁹ Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*. KonstIX, 7, 58–59. p. 434: ἡμεῖς τὴν Σκλήραιναν βασίλισσαν οὐ θέλουμεν, οὐδὲ δι' αὐτὴν αἱ μάμμαι ἡμῶν αἱ πορφυρογέννητοι Ζωὴ τε καὶ Θεοδώρα θανοῦνται.

Konstantinos Leichoudes and Michael Psellos.⁷⁰ As a result, according to Skylitzes, the supporters of Isaakios I Komnenos accused Michael VI of “being ruled by eunuchs”.⁷¹ However, without a member of this dynasty, this political construction was weak. Consequently, Michael VI’s reign was short, lasting less than a year.

1.2.2 The Role of the People in the Political Process and the Expansion of the Senate

The Macedonian dynasty was the culmination of the dynastic succession in Byzantium. Six generations of the same family reigned one after another, although at times they had to share the throne with non-dynastic emperors under the pretext that they were protecting the legitimate successor. Such an accomplishment was only outdone by the Palaiologos dynasty. Meanwhile, the traditional emperor-making groups endorsed the *porphyrogennetoi*, but when the dynasty died out, acclamation was once again more than just a formality. For the acceptance of a new emperor in Constantinople, it was an unavoidable necessity.⁷²

While Zoe and Theodora were still alive, respect for the empresses and for the dynasty was necessary in order to rule, but not enough to guarantee the political survival of the emperors connected with them. Hence, the rulers used strategies through which they strove to win the support of the population of the capital. Therefore, the emperors turned to the merchants and shop-owners when the political situation became increasingly turbulent. From the 10th century onwards, the Byzantine Empire experienced an economic recovery that accelerated in the following centuries. Due to this historical development, the merchants in the whole empire, but especially in Constantinople, became increasingly richer.⁷³

Even though wealth was a condition for membership the aristocracy, not all forms of wealth were assessed equally by the Byzantines. The access of merchants and shop-owners to the senate came up against cultural and legal barriers. Yet these were partially removed by emperors in need of political backing.⁷⁴ “Those from the market”,

⁷⁰ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 660f; Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 5–42; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, reg. 80, pp. 68f. On Michael Psellos, Jeffrey et al, *PBW*, Michael 61. On the eunuch Theodoros, Jeffrey et al, *PBW*, Theodoros 105. On Konstantinos Leichoudes, Jeffrey et al, *PBW*, Konstantinos 13.

⁷¹ Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*. MichVI, 9.

⁷² See Ch. 1.2.2.

⁷³ Kazhdan/ Epstein, *Change*, p.30–56; Laiou/ Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy*, p. 90–165.

⁷⁴ In an indictment at the times of Alexios I Komnenos, the wife of a merchant refused to give back a deposit to her uncle. During the process, the uncles had to take an oath, which they refused to do in the front of the eparch because they held senatorial dignities, but the woman said that they could not enjoy

as the arrogant Byzantine authors called them, appeared often in acclamations and were introduced into the senate through imperial generosity.⁷⁵ Psellos accused Konstantinos IX Monomachos of introducing them into the senate and ruining the *politeia* as consequence of it.⁷⁶ Konstantinos X's first action as an emperor was to assemble the city's guilds (*ta somateia tes poleos*) and deliver them a speech in which he agreed not to order any illegal confiscations and to act lawfully. Furthermore, he granted them court titles and invalidated former seizures.⁷⁷

The merchants and shop-owners were not the only politically active group in the capital. When Isaakios Komnenos negotiated a compromise with the envoys of Michael VI after his military triumph near Nicaea, the Patriarch Keroularios and his supporters hurried in order to gain the upper hand in the succession, assembling the people and acclaiming Isaakios as emperor. This event led to the end of the negotiations and accelerated Isaakios' entry in Constantinople.⁷⁸ Because the people were starving and resenting the economic policies introduced by Nikephoritzes, they acclaimed Nikephoros Botaneiates as emperor.⁷⁹

The composition of what the Byzantine authors described as "people" is debatable. Anthony Kaldellis denies that these were only the wealthy merchants and shop-owners. He points out a massive participation of the crowds in the political events. The sources seem to confirm his views.⁸⁰ Rulers promoted the merchants and it can be assumed that the emperors adopted this strategy because they expected that the wealthier part of the "people" would exert influence over the rest of it. Attaleiates grants us one of the few insights into this political patronage. In his description of the boundless generosity of Nikephoros III to the inhabitants of Constantinople, the historian mentions the idle and the poor of the capital gathered around the titleholders.

such a privilege, for they were *systematikoi* and *pragmaeutai*, namely they worked in activities not connected with agriculture. Alexios I decided then that the senators could take an oath at home under the condition that they were not members of any guild under the authority of the eparch. Those who still conducted commercial activities had to take oath publically despite their position, Zepos, Jus, I, pp. 645–646; Dölger/ Wirth, Regesten nr. 1162a; Lemerle, Cinq Études, pp. 291–292.

⁷⁵ Angold, The Byzantine Empire. A Political History, pp. 94–98; Cheynet, Pouvoir, pp. 199–205; Fögen, Das politische Denken, pp. 41–85; Laiou/ Morrison, The Byzantine Economy, pp. 140–142; Kazhdan/ Epstein, Change, pp. 69f; Lemerle, Cinq Études, pp. 251–313; Treadgold, A History, pp. 677–684.

⁷⁶ Michael Psellos, Chronographia, V, 29.

⁷⁷ Michael Attaleiates, Historia, 71. Furthermore, see Cheynet, The Byzantine Aristocracy (10th–12th Centuries), pp. 15.

⁷⁸ Michael Psellos, Chronographia, VII, 15–44; Ioannes Zonaras, Epitomē Historiōn, 3, 664f.; Michael Attaleiates, Historia, 56–58.

⁷⁹ Michael Attaleiates, Historia, 255–273.

⁸⁰ Kaldellis, How to Usurp, p. 55f.

The poor stood under the city's colonnade, praising both the courtiers and the emperor in the hope of receiving donations. Even these were supposedly enriched by the emperor's generosity, for the titleholders and the privileged were so numerous that a stream of money in the form of donations, the so-called "Christ's custom", reached the poor. They walked around the whole city in order to gather the gifts.⁸¹ Here, the existence of a dependence relation between the titleholders and the urban crowd, to which the homeless, unemployed, unspecialized workers and outcasts of all kinds belonged, is presented. This penniless mob forced the courtiers to distribute the results of the imperial munificence.⁸²

The failed rebellions display in even clearer tones the importance of the people in the acclamations. During the rebellion of Leon Tornikes in 1047, he managed to achieve a crushing victory against the troops loyal to Konstantinos IX at the doors of Constantinople. Tornikes could have taken the city. Yet he declined and did not enter Constantinople. His indecision gave the emperor time to reinforce the walls. The next day, Tornikes returned to the walls, waiting for the invitations of the inhabitants of the city, which did not come. Eventually, Leon Tornikes was defeated.⁸³

The rebellion of Nikephoros Bryennios in 1077 and 1078 was similar. The rebel sent his brother, Ioannes Bryennios, to Constantinople, who did not besiege the city but waited at its gates, expecting to be invited in by the inhabitants. According to Attaleiates, they had already chosen Botaneiates, who was rebelling simultaneously in Anatolia, as emperor. The inhabitants of Constantinople did not open the doors to the troops accompanying Ioannes Bryennios. When the latter noticed that his entrance was not desired, he made his troops acclaim Nikephoros Bryennios again and ordered that houses in the district of Saint Panteleon should be burned down. His aim was probably to force the inhabitants to allow the soldiers' entrance, but they did not react as expected, for his actions nurtured the hate of the citizens. Eventually, Bryennios had to return hopelessly to his brother.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 275f.

⁸² Beck, *Konstantinopel*, pp. 34;

⁸³ Attaleiates states that he did not take the city out of philanthropy and precaution, for he did not want to hurt his own people. Later, he came back expecting to be received as a victorious general by a fearful population, but he encountered the besieged prepared and still resisting to his entry. Psellos affirms, by contrast, that Tornikes could have waited to be acclaimed by the senate and the people. Moreover, he was unwilling to shed the blood of his relatives. Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, 114; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 26–28.

⁸⁴ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 242–255.

The recorded conflicts between emperors or rebels and the inhabitants of Constantinople, as well as its political groups, are examples of the increasing influence of the “people” during the 11th century, as well as of their cooperation with the senate. For successful and failed rebel commanders, acclamation by the people of Constantinople was an unavoidable condition for the confirmation of their position as emperors. Naturally, the fragmentation in many groups enabled manipulation by different various groups and the acclamation did not need to come from all citizens, a significant minority sufficed, but the cases of the rebellions of Leon Tornikes in 1047 and of Nikephoros Bryennios in 1077 and 1078 proved that imperial power could not be achieved solely through violence although some of them, mainly Tornikes, had means to do so.

1.2.3 New Enemies: Military Challenges for the Empire and State Reforms

After a century of frontier expansion, the Byzantines had to face frequent defeats and territorial loss in the second half of the 11th century. The sudden turn can be explained by the fact that Byzantium started to fight with more numerous and more demanding enemies: the Petchenegs, Cumans, and Normans in the West, and Seljuks, as well as other Turkish nomad groups in the East. Yet the timing could not have been worse, for the new enemies appeared while Byzantium was facing an internal political crisis. The reigning emperors had to adapt the state to the new conditions while they strove to construct a power basis. How successful these adaptations were is controversial. Paul Lemerle understands this epoch as one of social and economic progress in which society became richer and more open. The introduction of merchants into the Senate and the development of the bureaucracy during the reign of Konstantinos IX (1042–1055), Michael VI (1057) and Konstantinos X (1059–1067) demonstrated that Byzantium was ready to adapt to the transformations that were happening in the rest of the Mediterranean. Even the devaluation of the *nomismata* and the demobilization of the Iberian *themata* under Konstantinos IX are considered by him to be signs of a richer and more monetized society.⁸⁵

The Byzantine economy expanded and society became more dynamic. Otherwise, the rapprochement between emperors and merchants would not have happened. The economic expansion also extended to the provinces, but it resulted in an unequal distribution of wealth due to the increasing pressure by the Byzantine imperial

⁸⁵ Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp. 263–293.

authority for a growth of fiscal entries and the generous tax exemptions granted by the emperors who reigned after Basileios II. This led to the emergence of new provincial powers and the transformation of the local peasantry from independent farmers to tenants.⁸⁶

As a countermeasure, emperors such as Konstantinos IX, Konstantinos X and their supporters put reforms in motion whose aim was to dismantle the huge military structure built up in the previous decades. They demobilized *themata* such as the Iberian and increasingly the defense had to rely on foreign mercenaries and allied frontier rulers.⁸⁷ Officers in frontier regions were often alternated in order to avoid the development of dependence relations between commanders and commanded, which was an important ingredient for rebellions. Until the reign of Isaakios I, the custom of dispatching officers of Western origin to the East and vice-versa seemed to be the rule.⁸⁸ Together with the reorganization of the military, Konstantinos IX reformed the provincial administration by establishing the office of *epi ton kriseon* to manage the work of the provincial judges, releasing them from the authority of the *strategoi*.⁸⁹

Another important development at this time was the generous policy toward urban merchants and shop-owners. Since these received stipends, the *rogai*, when they were introduced into the senate, this policy could have been connected with the devaluation of the gold coin. Lemerle believes that the devaluation was ordered by Konstantinos IX in order to fulfill the needs of a more monetized society.⁹⁰ Although a more complex economic situation in the 11th century may have given the Byzantines a

⁸⁶ Cheynet questions the importance of the tax exemptions, for they supposedly affected solely the secondary contributions and were granted mostly to monasteries. Furthermore, they were valid as long as the beneficiary had the good will of the reigning emperor, otherwise they could be ignored by the tax collectors. Even so, the importance of such exemptions shall not be ignored, see Cheynet, *The Byzantine Aristocracy (8th–13th Centuries)*, pp. 27f. See also Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 89–90; Laiou/Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy*, pp. 106, 156.

⁸⁷ Cheynet denies that there was a rupture between the policy put in motion in the mid-10th century and the one of the successors of Basileios II. According to this author, the successors of Basileios II continued his policy by keeping a smaller, but more effective army. Hence, there was no impairment of the capacities of the Byzantine armed forces. This skepticism was recently shared by Anthony Kaldellis for whom there is not enough evidence to sustain that a demilitarization policy was implemented and attribute the several military defeats faced by the Byzantines in the second half of the 11th century to the overwhelming number of adversaries. Both Cheynet and Kaldellis prefers not to give credit to the contemporary reports on the deterioration of the armed forces, which are the only ones we have on the subject. However, the fact that different authors who belonged to different or even opposing political circles such as Psellos, Attaleiates and Bryennios agree that there was mismanagement in the military is in itself strong evidence that it in fact happened. Cheynet, *La politique militaire*, pp. 61–74; Kaldellis, *Streams*, pp. 224–228.

⁸⁸ Angold, *Belle Époque*, pp. 598–602; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 378–387; Haldon, *Warfare*, p. 90f.

⁸⁹ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 197–199; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 58–63; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp. 263–269.

⁹⁰ Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp. 285–287.

better understanding of the finances, Michael Angold perceives, in opposition to Lemerle, the economic advantages as accidental, for the assessments defending an economic rationale behind these measures are based on modern models. In his opinion, the cause of the devaluation was the necessity of the state, both the increase in the bureaucracy and the wages of the mercenaries.⁹¹ The same author – convinced of the connection between the devaluation of the *nomismata* and the demobilization of the provincial *themata* – states, “it has to be admitted, however, that complaints about the failure of the honor system coincide with, rather than antedate, the debasement of the coinage. The two worked together to undermine the fabric of the state: the inflation of honors combined with other items of unnecessary expenditure and with various fiscal measures to cause budgetary difficulties, leading to debasement under Constantine Monomachos. Thereafter the combination of debasement and a galloping inflation of honors ensured that the financial position would continue to deteriorate and well-conceived measures of reform had little chance of success.”⁹²

In addition to the financial ruin of the state, these policies had military consequences. According to Zonaras, these reforms were responsible for the defeats that Byzantium suffered in the following years.⁹³ From the reign of Konstantinos IX, the Petchenegs ransacked the Balkans and made the Western provinces unsafe until Alexios Komnenos subdued those completely. The Petcheneg offensive was a reality shock for Monomachos and his circle, to which Michael Psellos, Konstantinos Leichoudes and Ioannes Xiphilinos belonged. Consequently, they all lost the imperial favor and had to leave the court temporarily.⁹⁴

The crisis in the Byzantine military, especially on the Eastern frontiers, had another cause. The constant civil wars during the 11th century demanded men and attention from the Byzantine fighting forces. Instead of guarding the frontiers and fighting enemies, the Byzantine soldiers were busy fighting one another. Consequently,

⁹¹ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 83–85. More on the devaluation of the *nomisma*, see Cheynet, *Dévaluation*, pp. 453–477; Laiou/ Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy*, pp. 148–151.

⁹² Angold, *Belle Époque*, p. 598. Magdalino also links the devaluation of the *nomisma* with the devaluation of titles although indirectly: “By the end of the eleventh century, it [the title *protospatharios*] had dropped off the honors list, along with *magistros*, *patrikios*, and many others. Like the coinage in which their attendant salaries were paid, they had become devalued through inflated distribution by insecure emperors buying support against their internal and external enemies.” Magdalino, *Court Society*, p. 228.

⁹³ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 647.

⁹⁴ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, 191–203, also Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 63–70

the frontiers were neglected and the number of troops deployed in these regions was reduced. Moreover, the policy of the Patriarch Konstantinos Leichoudes (1059–1064) against the Miaphysites affected the relations between the Byzantium and the Armenians, who were numerous in the frontier regions, negatively. As a consequence, the Empire suffered heavy military defeats in Melitene in 1058, in Ani in 1064 and finally in Manzikert in 1071, and the insecurity in the provinces increased.⁹⁵

1.2.4 The Reign of Isaakios I Komnenos (1057–1059): a Komnenos for the First Time on the Throne

Isaakios Komnenos' seizure of power began with the dissatisfaction of a group of military officers concerning the biased treatment by the Emperor Michael VI. They complained that he was not so generous to the officers as he was to the courtiers, senators and the populace. The commanders led by Isaakios Komnenos and Katakalon Kekaumenos went to the emperor twice as representatives of the unsatisfied officers in order to express their disgruntlement and to demand equal treatment.⁹⁶ Yet their demands were denied. Probably the emperor was not satisfied with the performance of the two mentioned officers at the frontiers. Accusations against Kekaumenos during his tenure as *doux* of Antioch resulted in his substitution by the emperor's nephew.⁹⁷

The portrayal of the rebellion led by Isaakios Komnenos as a dispute between the military and the civil aristocracy does not correspond to historical reality. Although Isaakios was supported by officers from important Eastern units, most of the Western troops and an important part of the Eastern military officers remained loyal to Michael VI. This insurrection also cannot be seen as a conflict between the Eastern and Western

⁹⁵ On the invasions of the Turks, Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 40–44; Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, passim; Charanis, *Diversity and Breakdown*, pp. 1–20; Korobeinikov, *Raiders and neighbours*, pp. 693–727.

⁹⁶ Michael, *Attaleiates, Historia*, 53; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 657; Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, MichVI, 1–2. See also Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, reg. 80, p. 68f, as well as 339–344; On Isaakios I Komnenos, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Isaakios 1; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 4, 41–47.

⁹⁷ Katakalon Kekaumenos was released from the office as *doux* of Antioch and substituted by the emperor's nephew, the *magistros* Michael, Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 654. Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat (969–1084)*, pp. 249; See also, Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, MichaVI, 2, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Katakalon 101; Savvides, *Family of Kekaumenos*, pp. 12–27; Savvides, *Addenda et corrigenda*, pp. 224–226.

provinces, for a certain Bryennios from Adrianople supported the conspiracy and was blinded in consequence of it.⁹⁸

In fact, the Doukai were originally a family with a strong presence in the military and Skylitzes lists the brothers Konstantinos and Ioannes Doukas among the army officers who accompanied Isaakios Komnenos and Katakalon Kekaumenos in their complaints to the emperor.⁹⁹ However, both Doukai were not mentioned in his description of the battle of Nicaea. Moreover, Konstantinos Doukas was connected with the family Dalassenos through a former marriage, and to the Makrembolitai and Keroularioi through his wife, Eudokia Makrembolitissa. He also had an unspecified family connection with Isaakios Komnenos. Therefore, it is reasonable to conjecture that the Doukas brothers acted as a connection between the Isaakios and the urban elite in Constantinople.¹⁰⁰ This association with the Patriarch Keroularios and the city aristocracy was decisive for Isaakios Komnenos' acclamation as emperor in 1057, after his military victory in Nicaea.

After almost two hundred years, an emperor has been instated without the blessing of the Macedonian dynasty. Isaakios I believed that he could legitimize his rule without the dynastic factor, solely through this victory, for he ordered coins in which he portrayed himself in full military panoply and bearing a naked sword to be minted. Although Isaakios I had fulfilled all the conditions necessary to legitimize his rule as emperor in achieving a decisive victory on the battlefield, being acclaimed by the political groups and crowned by the patriarch, his efforts to implement reforms demonstrated that his position was in fact weak.

The beginning of Isaakios I's reign was marked by consent between the emperor and the people of Constantinople: he was received by the people and the senate with pomp and celebration. Most likely at their request, he rewarded his soldiers in the city quickly and released them, fearing that they would create problems if they remained in

⁹⁸ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 658; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 53f. On his career, see Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, Introduction by Paul Gautier, pp. 14–16; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Anonymus 195.

⁹⁹ Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, MichVI, 10, 11. Michael Psellos calls him “*doux*” twice, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 83 (ὁ δοῦξ Κωνσταντῖνος) and 84 (τῷ δουκὶ Κωνσταντίνῳ).

¹⁰⁰ On the connection with the Dalassenoi, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 98(a6): γυναῖκα δὲ γήμας καὶ γένει περιφανῆ (Κωνσταντίνου γὰρ ἦν παῖς ἐκείνου, ὃν τὸ μὲν χωρίον ἡ Δάλασσα ἤνεγκεν, ἡ δὲ ῥώμη πανταχοῦ τῆς οἰκουμένης ἐκήρυξε). (he [Konstantinos Doukas] married a woman of notorious stock, for she was the daughter of Konstantinos, who the city of Dalassa brough forth and Rome proclaimed as conqueror all over the inhabited world). The relation to the Komnenoi is very broadly defined (τῆς ἀγχιστείας ἐγγύτατος), Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 56. More on Konstantinos X Doukas, see Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 28–38.

Constantinople.¹⁰¹ This promising beginning was subsequently ruined because Isaakios I suspended privileges and tax exemptions for private people, office holders, monasteries, and churchmen. Although themselves offspring from the middle of society and promoted by the meritocratic policy of previous emperors, Michael Psellos and Michael Attaleiates agreed that Isaakios I's reforms were necessary, considering the bad condition of the Byzantine state finances.¹⁰² Yet Psellos stressed that the reforms were introduced too swiftly. This convulsed the body politic, causing discontent not only among senators and other members of the city elite but also among the soldiers, who were affected by the emperor's measures too.¹⁰³

Tensions became critical in consequence of the dispute between the emperor and the Patriarch Michael Keroularios. The latter was appointed by Konstantinos IX. In the power vacuum of that time, Keroularios became one of the most powerful people in Constantinople not because of his office, but due to his personal influence and his political connections. Attaleiates accused him of establishing a temporary administration during the *interregnum* between the deposition of Michael VI and the arrival of Isaakios Komnenos, distributing offices and functions.¹⁰⁴

The conflict between the emperor and the patriarch was a consequence of the cancellation of ecclesiastical privileges and the confiscation of monastic property. The patriarch considered that the hated measures weakened the emperor's position. Keroularios thus began to adopt imperial privileges, such as wearing purple shoes, and threatened the emperor with deposition. The arrogance of the patriarch was too much for Isaakios Komnenos, who ordered that Keroularios should be arrested outside Constantinople in order to avoid a tumult among his supporters. Afterwards, he was brought to justice. The same applied to his relatives. His demonstration of power over the patriarch was, however, a Pyrrhic victory, for Keroularios died before his process was brought to an end and Isaakios had the patriarch's death on his conscience. He,

¹⁰¹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 59.

¹⁰² Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 51–64; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 60–62, Krallis states how the confiscation of property and the cancellation of privileges during the reign of Isaakios I and Konstantinos X were differently assessed by Attaleiates. The difference lay in the purpose: while Isaakios I wanted to restore the finances, Konstantinos X solely wanted to accumulate money, see Krallis, Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline, pp. 115–126.

¹⁰³ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 60: ἐντεῦθεν τό τε δημοτικὸν πλῆθος, ἀπεχθάνεται αὐτῶ· καὶ τῶν στρατιωτῶν οὐκ ὀλίγον τι μέρος, ὅσοις τὰς εὐπορίας ἐξέκοψεν. (in this way the popular masses hated him, also not a small part of the soldier as well, through it he lost their support)

¹⁰⁴ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 58.

therefore, allowed Keroularios' corpse to be buried in a monastery he had founded and reinstated his nephews in his retinue.¹⁰⁵

These conciliatory measures were insufficient to avoid the emergence of opposition. The dispute with the patriarch cost the support Keroularios had secured among the parties in the city. Isaakios I was alone and hated for his confiscations. The campaign against the Petchenegs in 1059, whose success might have afforded the emperor some relief, was indecisive. A relatively serious disease gave Isaakios Komnenos a pretext to abdicate and transfer the imperial power to Konstantinos Doukas, who may have inherited Keroularios' supporters because of his familial connection with the late patriarch.¹⁰⁶

The role played by Isaakios I's kin in his reign, such as his brother Ioannes Komnenos and his nephew Theodoros Dokeianos, is controversial.¹⁰⁷ Zonaras mentions that Isaakios I made Ioannes Komnenos *kouropalates* and *megas domestikos*.¹⁰⁸ Nikephoros Bryennios states that Isaakios offered the throne to Ioannes, which he did not accept despite Anna Dalassene's loud protests. Skylitzes Continuatus informs us that Konstantinos Doukas was always his first choice, as his co-conspirator and financier.¹⁰⁹ Psellos, however, reports that Isaakios treated his brother like everybody else and consciously excluded him from succession.¹¹⁰ Yet this version can be attributed to the fact that Psellos wanted to justify this controversial succession and the part he played in it. Isaakios I did benefit his brother, but he neither elevated his kinship over the rest of the aristocracy nor strove to build up a power group based on it. Consequently, Ioannes Komnenos refused to consider forcing his candidature as his brother's successor, for he most likely felt too weak politically in comparison with Konstantinos Doukas.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Skylitzes Continuatus, 105–106; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 668–670; Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 65; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 62–66. See also Angold, *Church*, pp. 23–25; Beck, *Kirche*, p. 107; Tiftixoglu, *Gruppenbildungen*, pp. 25–72.

¹⁰⁶ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 672f; Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 75–92; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 69; Skylitzes Continuatus, 108.

¹⁰⁷ On Ioannes Komnenos, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Ioannes 63; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 6, pp. 49–57. On Theodoros Dokeianos, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Theodoros 101; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 9, pp. 59–31.

¹⁰⁸ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 666; Skylitzes Continuatus, 103.

¹⁰⁹ Skylitzes Continuatus, 108.

¹¹⁰ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 89–92.

¹¹¹ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, I, 1–5, pp. 75–85. For a political and rhetoric assessment, see Neville, *Heroes*, pp. 146–151.

Isaakios I's political errors were clear for his contemporaries. The emperor trusted the elite of Constantinople, whose loyalty was unpredictable. He introduced reforms hastily. Consequently, Isaakios lost political support and was abandoned by his alleged allies. Moreover, Isaakios I did not bestow enough favors on his family. Overall, if his errors were obvious to Byzantine historians, they must have been similarly obvious to his relatives: if they chose, they could learn how to conduct themselves if they should take the imperial throne again someday.

1.2.5 From Konstantinos X Doukas (1059–1068) to Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081)

The following emperors did not continue Isaakios I's reforms. After Konstantinos X Doukas (1059–1068) held an inaugural speech to the guilds of the city and to the senators, he immediately reestablished the privileges and revenues canceled by Isaakios.¹¹² Apart from Psellos, whose influence in the court depended on the favor of the Doukai, the other historians criticized the reign of Konstantinos X. Attaleiates and Zonaras accuse him of neglecting the frontiers and the military. Attaleiates, therefore, considers him responsible for the fall of Ani. The devastation of the Western *themata* by the treat imposed by the Uzes was removed only because of a disease that wiped out the invaders. At the same time, Konstantinos X implemented a harmful tax policy, which resulted in the insurrection in Larissa reported in detail by Kekaumenos.¹¹³

During the reign of Konstantinos X, the gold coin was further debased, indicating a worsening of the financial situation of the state. Although there is no clear causal relation between these debasements and his generous policy, its simultaneity is strong evidence of a possible connection. Konstantinos X appeared to have learned from the errors of his predecessors and involved his family in the government by appointing his brother, Ioannes Doukas, as *kaisar* and crowning his sons as co-emperors. Despite military defeats and financial crises, he was able to establish a dynastic succession.¹¹⁴

Under Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071), the military became the center of attention once again. Romanos had a reputation for his military deeds in the Western

¹¹² See Ch. 2, fn. 77.

¹¹³ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 676f; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 76–87. On the rebellion in Larissa, Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 66–74, also Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, reg. 85, p. 72

¹¹⁴ Angold, *Belle Époque*, pp. 607–610; Treadgold, *A History*, pp. 600–604. More on the devaluation of the *nomisma*, see Cheynet, *Dévaluation*, pp. 453–477; Laiou/ Morrison, *The Byzantine Economy*, pp. 148–151.

provinces. That was probably the reason – and not sexual attraction – why the Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa chose him as her husband, the emperor and the guardian for the under-age Doukas.¹¹⁵ In his three-year reign, Romanos IV led many campaigns against Turks in which he aspired to reestablish the Byzantine armed forces after a period of abandonment. The Doukai feared that a decisive victory would result in the legitimation of his rule and a deposition of their family. Consequently, they contributed actively to the defeat in Manzikert in 1071. Actually, this event was not a military tragedy, but it did have decisive effects in the political context. It was followed by rebellions that compromised the political and territorial cohesion of the Empire, consumed the remaining military forces and attracted the Turks to Byzantine territory, who were introduced in Anatolia in order to fight in the following civil wars. This unquestionably contributed to the end of Byzantine Anatolia and to the establishment of Turkish hegemony.¹¹⁶

The Sultan Alp Arslan released the Emperor Romanos Diogenes not long after he was captured in the confusion of the battle. Meanwhile, Michael Doukas, under the influence of the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas and Michael Psellos, his tutor, seized the imperial power and declared the deposition of Romanos Diogenes. He, however, did not accept this and fought the Doukai in a civil war, which concluded with his defeat and being blinding.¹¹⁷

Through that violent action, Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078), the son of Konstantinos X, confirmed his position as emperor. However, he came soon under the influence of his *logothetes* of the *dromou* Nikephoros or “Nikephoritzes”, as he is widely known. Psellos does not mention him. Attaleiates, Zonaras and Bryennios consider him repressive and conspiratorial. They attributed the removal of Ioannes Doukas and the *synkellos* Ioannes, the metropolitan of Side, from the private council to him, and accused him of making the emperor his slave.¹¹⁸ Bryennios limits his criticism

¹¹⁵ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 684–687; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 92–101; Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, pp. 62–66, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, *Eudokia 1*; Polemis, *The Doukas*, pp. 28–34.

¹¹⁶ On the defeat in Manzikert and its direct consequences, Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 44–48; Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, pp. 133–168; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 348; Cheynet, *Mantzikert*, pp. 410–438; Hillenbrand, *Turkish Myth*, *passim*; Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates and the Politics of Imperial Decline*, pp. 77–84, 132–134; Vratimos, *Was Michael Attaleiates present?*, pp. 3–14.

¹¹⁷ Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, Nr. 984, 985, 987a.

¹¹⁸ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 708; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 179–183; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 1–2, pp. 142–144. On Nikephoritzes’ role in the government, Beck, *Ministerpräsident*, p. 329f.

to Michael VII, probably because of his wife, Anna Komnene, who was a Doukas through her mother, and because of Eirene Doukaina, the empress who requested a history on Alexios' reign from Bryennios. Zonaras and Attaleiates, however, make even more severe accusations concerning the financial measures of the *logothetes*. Both describe a repressive regime in which the property of important citizens was confiscated. In their view, Nikephoros implemented these actions not for the well-being of the state, but for his own good. Meanwhile, the Turks ransacked the Eastern provinces, reaching Chrysopolis and Chalcedon.¹¹⁹ After Michael VII's deposition, the *logothetes* of the *dromou* was arrested and tortured by the orders of Romanos Straboromanos. His captors were convinced that Nikephoritzes had assembled an enormous wealth during his time in office and wanted to know where it was hidden. They also feared that Nikephoritzes could draw the new emperor, Nikephoros III, under his influence.¹²⁰

Michael VII's government intended to restore the state finances through further monetization of the taxes and the debasement of the *nomisma*. It also attempted to reorganize the army by establishing the *tagma* of the "immortals".¹²¹ It is possible that Nikephoritzes was unjustly assessed by Byzantine historians, for it seems that he clearly strove to reorganize the bankrupted state even though some of his measures only worsened the situation.

Because provinces were insecure due to Petchenegs and Turkish advances, crowds of refugees fled to Constantinople and the failure of the economic measures led to famine among the population of the capital.¹²² Until that moment, the government of Michael VII had to face little opposition, but finally two major military rebellions broke out in a very short time: the insurrection of Nikephoros Bryennios and the rebellion of Nikephoros Botaneiates. The latter was an elderly commander of prominent ancestry with strong support in Constantinople. Botaneiates was backed by a group of Eastern aristocrats: Alexandros Kabasilas, the family Synadenos, Romanos Straboromanos, a certain Goudelios, and by members of the senate.¹²³ With the help of Turkish auxiliary

¹¹⁹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 708; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 198–201.

¹²⁰ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 726.

¹²¹ On the role of the *logothetes* Nikephoros, see Angold, Michael, *Political History*, pp. 121–124; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 350; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, 1977, pp. 260–263; Treadgold, *A History*, pp. 604–607. On the *tagma* of the immortals, see Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, pp. 243–246.

¹²² Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 714f; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 211f.

¹²³ Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 172.

troops, Botaneiates marched from his country house in Anatolia to the capital, where he was acclaimed as emperor.¹²⁴

Nikephoros III (1078–1081) followed the customs of his direct predecessors, awarding the inhabitants of the city and the Turks generously for their support with titles and presents. If we are to believe Attaleiates, the number of titleholders seemed to have achieved a peak during Nikephoros III's reign. The emperor also announced a debt relief.¹²⁵ Although Attaleiates reports an unstoppable flow of presents, offices, refunds and debt remissions, Bryennios presents another image by informing us that the *rogai*, the senatorial stipends, could not be paid anymore because the imperial treasury seemed to be empty.¹²⁶

Despite the contradicting reports, there is enough evidence to conclude that Nikephoros III was the last emperor who could use the generous policy implemented by Basileios II's direct successors, which was intensified by Konstantinos IX. Nikephoros was able to dispense favours and concessions to supporters and former adversaries after his successful seizure of power, but, during his reign, the state treasure seemed to be finally exhausted. The causes were possibly the difficulties imposed by the military efforts against invaders and usurpers, resulting in loss of tax income. Moreover, the increasing political instabilities and lack of legitimacy forced the Byzantine emperors to be more generous than their predecessor in trying to ensure their position, which naturally created increasing strain on the state finances.

1.2.6 The “Vicious Circle” of the 11th century: the Generous Pragmatism and the State-conservative Reformers

Through the summary of the political developments in Byzantium between 1054 and 1081 presented above, it is evident that the Byzantine Empire was trapped in a vicious circle caused by the necessity of tackling contradictory facts. The disappearance of the Macedonian dynasty led to a legitimacy crisis. Despite the lack of an established dynastic rule for the succession in Byzantium, the Macedonian emperors enjoyed strong support in Constantinople in consequence of its length and success, which limited the ambitions within the aristocracy. Temporarily, their efforts to seize the imperial power in a long term were condemned to fail. Yet the imperial throne was open to competition

¹²⁴ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 715–720; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 237–273; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, III, 15–24.

¹²⁵ See Ch. 1, fn. 35.

¹²⁶ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 1, pp. 256–258.

again once the dynasty died out. There was no obstacle anymore for the officers and their ambition. It must be added that the legacy of soldier-emperors such as Basileios II was an enormous and expensive military structure that granted its officers influence and power. Hence, the military officers had at their disposition the support of the soldiers and their retinue, as well as of their kin, who in their turn provided the support of their soldiers and their retinue. Yet they were initially estranged from the bureaucracy of the capital, which not only controlled the central administration but was also near to the emperors.

In that sense, it is possible to understand a conflict between the military and the bureaucracy. A continuous tension existed between the army commanders, who were mostly members of families with an army tradition, and the central administration, which was run by individuals who were not necessarily from established families. The administration was open to new talents coming from the middle layers of the Constantinople's society. By examining the most influential people of the time, it is noticeable that social climbers were as numerous as the members of the traditional families were. Psellos and Attaleiates reflect the ideology supporting that not only nobility of blood but also that of character, as well as capacity, should be considered when appointing officers. Yet these two groups are not clearly separated since provincial aristocrats moved to Constantinople during the 11th century as a result of imperial pressure, political strategy and the increasing insecurity in the provinces. Thus, members of "military" families began to marry into "civil" families and hold civil offices. Therefore, the political history of Byzantium cannot be understood in these terms.

Striving for legitimacy and dealing with increasing influence of the officers, emperors such as Konstantinos IX Monomachos and Konstantinos X Doukas decided to dismantle the military structure in part and to implement a generous policy with the saved funds. Their natural beneficiaries were the merchants of Constantinople, who profited from the economic recovery, but lacked social recognition. Accordingly, the emperors granted them senatorial titles, expecting that they, in their turn, would support the rulers politically. The cutbacks within the military and the reform of the state were aimed to adapt the Byzantine polity to the social and economic changes of the 11th century. However, they facilitated the invasion of new and more dangerous enemies: the Turks, Petchenegs, and Normans. From the 1050s on, they made the provinces

increasingly insecure and presented the Byzantines with new challenges, to which the new organization had no adequate response.

The insecurity and the dissatisfaction of the military promoted the ascension of Isaakios I and Romanos IV. Both intended in their own way to implement reactionary reforms whose objective was to give back the Byzantine imperial state its capacity to react. Isaakios I wanted to cancel the distributed privileges and reduce the senate to its former size and Romanos IV intended to reestablish the former acting capacity of the army. Their measures, however, were in conflict with the interests of the new economic elite of the capital. With further distribution of court dignities, Konstantinos IX, Konstantinos X and Nikephoros III satisfied the need for social recognition among the *nouveau riche*. Consequently, they were able to secure their position as emperors and reign for longer periods. Nikephoros III was the exception because the system was broken during his reign. Meanwhile, the imperial treasury was depleted, the political cohesion of the Empire was compromised and the authority of the emperor outside Constantinople was weakened.

The Byzantine political history in the 11th century was characterized by the struggle between two approaches. The pragmatic emperors like Konstantinos IX, Michael VI, Konstantinos X and Nikephoros III focused their attention on the adaptation of the state to changing economic conditions, on the promotion of new social forces and on the urgent search for political support among the leaders of the population of Constantinople and some factions within the military. This approach was well received, but it ruined the foundations of the state. The second policy, distinctive during the reigns of Isaakios I and Romanos IV aimed at the maintenance or the recovery of the capacity of the state to act. They promoted austerity policies, such as the cancellation of privileges, tax exemptions, and gratifications. Yet this approach faced strong opposition and emperors who ventured to implement these measures quickly lost political support. Finally, this vicious circle was broken by Alexios Komnenos, when he adopted aspects of both approaches.

2. The Family History of the Doukai and Komnenoi from the 10th Century to 1081

In the lines below, it will be presented how the conditions presented in the former chapter presented ideal circumstances for the accession of an emperor such as Alexios Komnenos to the throne and for the establishment of a regime such as the one he founded. Accordingly, it is important to tackle the political careers of the families Komnenos and Doukas up to 1081. While both families were affected by the context in which they lived, they were also players with a strong impact on political developments and responsible for significant changes in their times. Moreover, the political struggles during the reign of Alexios I were in many aspects a continuation of previous conflicts, thus it is meaningful to survey the history of both families and how they were connected with one another before 1081. Even though in the long term the alliance between the Doukai and the Komnenoi was the bedrock of the regime founded by Alexios, its genesis was troubled, demanding some adjustments in the first fifteen years of his rule.

2.1. The Doukai

Demetrios Polemis states that three family branches of the Doukas family are recorded before 1204. The first documented Doukai were Andronikos and his son Konstantinos. Although these were the first known carriers of the name Doukas/Doux, there was probably an ancestor who held the office *doux*, from which the surname derived. The obvious military background of Andronikos and Konstantinos Doukas and their close connection with the army supports this hypothesis. Because of their successes in the frontier war against the Arabs, the Doukes gained a strong reputation in Anatolia, leading to conflicts with the imperial authority. Andronikos was exiled between 906 and 907 after he lost favor with Leon VI through the machinations of Samonas. In 913, after the death of the Emperor Alexandros, the people of Constantinople acclaimed Konstantinos Doux as emperor in the Hippodrome. He stormed the Palace with the help of troops and supporters, but the attempt failed, resulting in a blood bath in which Konstantinos Doux and many other Doukes died. Others were arrested and later blinded or castrated.¹

The following family branch, the Doukas-Lydos, under Andronikos Doux Lydos and his sons, did not have such adventurous history as the previous Doukes. The degree of kinship is difficult to determine. They appear during the reign of Basileios II as

¹ Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 115; PmbZ, 23817.

supporters of the insurrection instigated by Bardas Skleros. It is assumed that they were later pardoned by the emperor, for the Lydoi are seen again fighting for Basileios II.²

The first documented member of the imperial branch of the Doukas is Andronikos Doukas, the father of the Emperor Konstantinos X and the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas. Polemis attributes to him a seal belonging to a certain Andronikos Doukas, *protospatharios* and *strategos* of the Great Preslav in the early to the middle 11th century.³ Yet Psellos does not name him among the famous ancestors of Konstantinos X, preferring Konstantinos Doux and his father Andronikos Doux as well as a certain Pantherios instead.⁴ Ioannes Skylitzes lists both Konstantinos and Ioannes Doukas, his brother, among the military officers offended by Michael VI.⁵ Although they are both first documented as army officers, their political career did not have strong connections with the military. There is no evidence that Konstantinos Doukas ever held military command before his elevation to the imperial throne.⁶ In the only reference to Konstantinos X in a campaign, he is portrayed as a ridiculous figure. When the Uzes crossed the Danube River and wasted the *themata* of Illyrikon and Hellas, Konstantinos X was under pressure to react. According to Attaleiates, his response was to assemble a force composed of 150 men, who were brought to a place named Choïrobakchoi near Constantinople. All were surprised by the fact that instead of calling the Eastern troops, he assembled this insignificant force. The emperor, however, was able to celebrate because he received news that the Uzes were decimated by disease.⁷ The *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas, in his turn, is often reported in the role of a commander, however in special situations that will be addressed below.

When Konstantinos Doukas assumed power, he had two sons, Michael and Andronikos. He had a third, Konstantios, after his crowning.⁸ Psellos reports that the two older boys were crowned co-emperors only after Konstantios, the *porphyrogenetos*, was crowned. Even though Psellos mentions that the father preferred

² On the Lydos-Doukas, Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 26f; PmbZ, 20410.

³ Jeffreys et al, PBW, 20128; Polemis, *The Doukai*, p. 28.

⁴ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 83, 98.

⁵ See Ch. 1, fn. 99.

⁶ Michael Psellos calls him “*doux*” twice but in total non-military contexts, Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 83 (ὁ δοῦξ Κωνσταντῖνος) and 84 (τῷ δοῦκι Κωνσταντίνῳ).

⁷ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 83–87.

⁸ On Konstantinos Doukas, Jeffreys et al, PBW, Konstantios 61; Polemis, *the Doukai*, pp 48–53, Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 55–57.

Michael Doukas as his successor, his actions indicate that he preferred Konstantios. It is possible that Psellos was trying to do Michael VII, his last patron, a favor.⁹

After the death of Konstantinos X, his widow, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, became the head of the regency in the name of their underage sons. However, this situation did not last long. Military pressures and – according to the sources – personal infatuation resulted in a union between Eudokia and Romanos IV Diogenes, which resulted in the birth of the *porphyrogennitoi*, Nikephoros, Konstantinos, and Leon Diogenes.¹⁰ Although Romanos IV became emperor in association with the sons of Konstantinos X, the new status quo threatened the position of the Doukai. They had only recently seized imperial power and their rule was not characterized by military victories or prosperity.

If the primacy of Romanos IV menaced the status of the Doukai, the emperor himself was not in a safe position. During the reign of Romanos IV Diogenes, there were two opposing groups at the palace, the Emperor Romanos IV and the Doukai. Both of them bequeathed us their version of the political events of these times: the *Chronographia* by Psellos, whose report of the events after 1059 is almost panegyric to the Doukai, and the *Historia* by Attaleiates, who was inclined to Romanos IV.¹¹ Attaleiates, who belonged to the group of Romanos IV's and later Nikephoros III's supporters, reports the conspiratorial movements of the Doukai, describing them as *ephedroi*, those who wait for the succession.¹² Skylitzes Continuatus is more direct in naming those who conspired against Romanos IV: the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas and his family, as well as Michael Psellos and Nikephoros Palaiologos.¹³

Not able to trust the Doukai, Romanos took them always with him on his campaigns to avoid conspiracies in Constantinople in his absence. Romanos once had to send Manuel Komnenos in his place, most likely because the internal situation was so dangerous that he could not leave the city.¹⁴ The undeclared war between the Doukai and Romanos IV found a tragic end in Manzikert. The defeat of 1071 had tactical and structural causes, but the Doukai used these weaknesses for their own interests. Attaleiates reports that during a tense retreat, Andronikos Doukas, responsible for the rear during the battle, spread the rumour that the emperor had fallen. Consequently, a

⁹ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 113; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, p. 44.

¹⁰ See Ch. 1, fn. 115. On the sons of Romanos IV, see Ch. 4.1.1.

¹¹ Krallis, *Attaleiates*, pp. 221–245; Vryonis Jr., *The Blinding*, pp. 3–14.

¹² Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 101f.

¹³ Skylitzes Continuatus, 140.24–41.

¹⁴ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 138–142; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 11, pp. 100–102.

supposedly organized retreat became a chaotic flight, resulting in the emperor's capture. Whether Andronikos Doukas was to blame for the defeat depends on the report. Attaleiates confirms it with some reserve.¹⁵ Because of his connection with the Doukai, Michael Psellos blames the Emperor Romanos IV for the defeat.¹⁶ Bryennios does not mention any contribution of the Doukai to the defeat, presenting the emperor as a victim of bad unnamed counselors.¹⁷ Since his work was written at the request of his mother-in-law, who happened to be the daughter of Andronikos Doukas, Nikephoros Bryennios would have a good reason to hide his responsibility for the defeat.¹⁸

When the Sultan Alp Arslan finally released Romanos IV, he immediately embarked on his return to Constantinople. In the meanwhile, Michael VII had become the ruler and the Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa was forced to release an edict announcing the deposition of Romanos IV.¹⁹ A civil war followed, in which Romanos Diogenes was defeated. When he was besieged in Adane in Cilicia, Romanos promised to resign the imperial title and to become a monk if he was to be spared. Although the conditions were initially accepted by the Doukai, Romanos Diogenes was blinded. For this action, Attaleiates accused Michael VII of ingratitude and perjury.²⁰ The defeat also deepened the enmity between Ioannes Doukas and Anna Dalassene, the head of the Komnenoi after the death of her husband. She was accused of exchanging letters with Romanos Diogenes during the civil war. In consequence, she was arrested and exiled.²¹

During the reign of Konstantinos X, Ioannes Doukas, his brother, promoted the career of Nikephoritzes, introducing him to the court during the reign of Michael VII, who became increasingly dependent on him. Since Nikephoritzes did not desire any competition concerning his influence over the emperor, he forced Ioannes Doukas out of court. Nikephoros did the same with Ioannes of Side. The once influential Michael

¹⁵ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 148–164.

¹⁶ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 136–143.

¹⁷ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 13–17, pp. 104–118.

¹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, Preface, iii, 2.

¹⁹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 168; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 983.

²⁰ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 176f; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 984, 985, 987a. On Adana, Hild/Hellenkemper, *TIB 5: Kilikien*, pp. 154–158.

²¹ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 22, pp. 128f; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 984; Polemis, *The Doukai*, p. 37; On Anna Dalassene's life before 1081, see Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 121–124; Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 21–50; Cheynet, *Les Dalassènoi*, pp. 438–439; Hill, *Actions*, pp. 45–62; Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, pp. 66–69; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 41–42; Runciman, *Women*, p. 17; Runciman, *The End*, pp. 517–524; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, p. 20–21; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 51–53.

Psellos was overshadowed by Nikephoritzes to such an extent that his role at court was limited to be the teacher of rhetoric for the emperor.²²

Nikephoritzes used the rebellion by the mercenary commander Roussel de Bailleul as a pretext to move Ioannes Doukas away from the emperor.²³ Michael VII appointed Ioannes Doukas and Andronikos, his son, as commanders of the Byzantine troops and employed them against Roussel at some point between 1073 and 1074. The *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas clearly did not want to go, sending his son instead. The emperor insisted though. Ioannes was then defeated by Roussel. During the battle, Ioannes and Andronikos Doukas were injured and captured. Once Michael VII rejected the conditions imposed by Roussel, the latter ordered his troops to acclaim Ioannes Doukas as emperor. Nikephoros Bryennios states that Ioannes Doukas offered some resistance to this plan at first, but Attaleiates does not mention any opposition at all by Ioannes. After the Turkish troops sent by Michael VII defeated Roussel de Bailleul, Ioannes Doukas returned to Constantinople. Fearing retribution, he took the monastic garb before he arrived. Ioannes Doukas was later pardoned, but he had to leave court. From now on, he no longer possessed any influence anymore over his nephew.²⁴

Even though Nikephoros III was successful in taking the imperial title from the Doukai, he was intelligent enough politically to maintain friendly relations with the family.²⁵ Moreover, following Ioannes Doukas' suggestion, Nikephoros III married the wife of his predecessor, Maria of Alania. The marriage resulted in a scandal, for Michael VII was then still alive. Yet the union helped to create a sense of continuity and favor for the Doukai.²⁶ Furthermore, Nikephoros III favored Konstantios Doukas, the son of Konstantinos X (1059–1067). After the acclamation of Botaneiates in Hagia Sophia in 1078, Alexios Komnenos, by the time *domestikos* of the *scholai*, urged Michael VII to react, but the emperor was disinclined. However, he showed himself inclined to appoint his brother, Konstantios, as his successor. Alexios, who was

²² On the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas, see Jeffreys et al, PBW, Ioannes 62; Neville, John Doukas, pp. 168–188; Polemis, The Doukai, pp. 34–41; Skoulatos, Les personnages, pp. 138–145; Leib, Jean Doukas, pp. 163–178.

²³ On Roussel de Bailleu, see Beihammer, Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia, pp. 230–234; Brand, Charles M, Art. “Roussel de Bailleu”, in ODB 3, pp. 1814f.; Hoffmann, Rudimente, pp. 13–20, 80–82, 109f, 118f, 138f, 134f; Prinzing, Günter, Art. “Roussel v. Bailleu”, in LeMA, 7, cols 1063f.

²⁴ Michael Attaleiates, Historia, 183–193; Nikephoros Bryennios, Hyle Historias, I, 14–18, pp. 166–180; Cheynet, Pouvoir, entry nr. 99, p.79f; Polemis, Notes, pp. 66–68.

²⁵ Michael Attaleiates, Historia, 304; Skylitzes Continuatus, 184.

²⁶ Ioannes Zonaras, Epitomē Historiōn, 3, 722; Nikephoros Bryennios, Hyle Historias, III, 25, pp. 252–254; Skylitzes Continuatus, 181f.

Konstantios' friend, convinced him to accept the imperial title. Yet they encountered resistance from the people, who did not approve of Alexios' intentions. Konstantios then decided to go to Nikephoros Botaneiates and submit himself to him.²⁷

Later, Nikephoros III put him at the head of a Byzantine force against the Turks in Chrysopolis. In this occasion, Konstantios decided to enforce his imperial claims as a Doukas and *porphyrogenetos* by rebelling as soon as he reached the Asiatic coast. Attaleiates gives us an interesting piece of information concerning this rebellion. He presents the *immortals*, unit created under Michael VII, among the rebellious troops. Attaleiates describes them as numerous and well trained, but undisciplined and disloyal.²⁸ The explanation for such a description could be that this unit retained some sense of loyalty to the family Doukas. At any rate, Konstantios' insurgency was a failure because the emperor bribed the insurgent troops in order to arrest the rebel leader. Consequently, Konstantios had to become a monk like his brother.²⁹

It is remarkable that Konstantios behaved completely differently towards Nikephoros III on two different occasions. When his brother resigned, Konstantios hesitated to strive for the imperial title, but shortly afterwards he decided to start an uprising. The difference lies in the fact that Konstantios was in Constantinople during the rebellion of Nikephoros Botaneiates in 1078. As it was demonstrated in the assessment of the insurrection of Nikephoros Bryennios, Botaneiates enjoyed massive support in the capital. Thus, if Konstantios wanted to become emperor, he would have to suppress the opposition of the Constantinopolitan population, as Alexios Komnenos proposed at the time and did himself some years later. As demonstrated above, candidates for the imperial title did not go against the will of the people of Constantinople. However, later as commander of troops and with the support of the soldiers, Konstantios was a stronger player, considering himself capable of applying pressure to Constantinople.

Nikephoros III's generosity towards the Doukai did not change the fact that they were excluded from the circle of decision-makers. Nikephoros Bryennios reports that the union between Nikephoros III and Maria of Alania, organized by Ioannes Doukas and Michael Doukas, his grandson, gave the *kaisar* some influence over the empress.³⁰

²⁷ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, Foreword, pp. 56–58; IV, 20–24, pp. 246–252.

²⁸ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 306f.

²⁹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 306–310; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 184–185. On this episode, Neville, *Heroes*, pp. 167–169; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 110, p. 87.

³⁰ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, III, 25.

However, it seems to have been very limited since he was living away from Constantinople when the Komnenoi rebelled.³¹ Moreover, a divorce from Eirene Doukaina may have been considered by Alexios Komnenos or at least by some members of the Komnenos faction, as well as a union with Maria of Alania.³² These plans conflicted with the interests of Ioannes Doukas directly and demonstrated that Maria of Alania enjoyed a relatively autonomous political agency independent of the other Doukai.³³

2.2 The Komnenoi

The origins of the Komnenoi can be traced back to the reign of Basileios II. This ruler promoted the ascension of officials from the middle ranks of the army in order to compensate the influence of the great houses Skleros and Phokas, resulting in the emergence of surnames such as Dalassenos, Bryennios, Tornikes and Komnenos and the reemergence of the Doukai.³⁴ In the times of Basileios II, two Komnenoi are registered. Nikephoros Komnenos was appointed commander in Vaspurakan in 1022.³⁵ Konstantinos VIII condemned him to be arrested and blinded in consequence of conspiracy accusations.³⁶

The second documented Komnenos was Manuel Komnenos, the father of Isaakios I and grandfather of Alexios I. According to Nikephoros Bryennios, Manuel Komnenos made the Emperor Basileios II responsible for the education of his sons, Isaakios and Ioannes. The emperor cared personally for their upbringing. Basileios II established the Monastery of Stoudios as their dwelling so that the brothers could enjoy the positive influence of the monks and participate in hunting and military training in the grounds not far from the monastery.³⁷

After Isaakios I's resignations, the Komnenoi had to face a worsening of their political situation even though they managed to maintain their proximity to the emperors by holding high military offices and court titles. Furthermore, Anna Dalassene ensured the position of her family by marrying her daughters to members of important

³¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vi, 5f.

³² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ii.

³³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, i–ii.

³⁴ See Ch. 1, fn. 55.

³⁵ Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, BasII/ KonstVIII, 39, p.971; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 39f.

³⁶ Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, KonstVIII, 1, p. 371.

³⁷ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 1, p. 74–77.

families of the Anatolian aristocracy.³⁸ While Ioannes Komnenos was still alive, Maria Komnene was married to Michael Taronites and Eudokia Komnene to Nikephoros Melissenos. Theodora was engaged to Konstantinos Diogenes, the son of the former Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes after the death of her father.³⁹ Besides the entry in the commemoration list at the Monastery of Christ, the Philanthropist, which informs us that Ioannes Komnenos died as a monk at July 12th, 1067, there is no more information about him. This means that he most likely fell from grace during the reign of Konstantinos X Doukas.⁴⁰ Anna Dalassene, in her turn, never completely accepted the removal of the Komnenoi. She considered Konstantinos X's seizure of power as usurpation by the Doukai. Consequently, she never omitted an opportunity to act against the Doukai. Years later, she resisted to a marriage union between the Doukai and the Komnenoi vehemently.⁴¹

The information on the Komnenoi up to the reign of Romanos IV is meager. Yet this emperor reinstated this family by appointing Manuel Komnenos, the older son of Ioannes Komnenos and Anna Dalassene, as the commander of the Eastern forces and granting him the title of *protoproedros* in 1070. Attaleiates praises his maturity despite his young age, his fairness when dealing with the soldiers and his early victories. Since he had few soldiers at his disposal, the *protoproedros* Manuel Komnenos was defeated and captured by the Turks. However, he managed to convince his captor, Chrysokoulos, a Turkish tribal leader, who lost favor with the Sultan Alp Arslan, to surrender to the emperor and become his servant. Romanos IV received Chrysokoulos joyfully, rewarding him with the title *proedros*. Manuel died shortly afterwards at the beginning of 1071.⁴²

During the civil war between the Doukai and Romanos Diogenes following the battle of Manzikert in 1071, the Doukai accused Anna Dalassene of corresponding with Romanos Diogenes. Consequently, she and her children were exiled to the Prinkipos Island.⁴³ Their exile, however, was not long, for the emperor Michael VII summoned them back to court after the death of Diogenes, proposing a marriage union between

³⁸ See Ch. 2, fn. 21 for Anna Dalassene's life before 1081.

³⁹ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 4, pp. 84f.

⁴⁰ Kouroupou/ Vannier, *Commémoraisons*, Entry nr. 29, p. 65.

⁴¹ Nikephoros Bryennios, III, 6, pp. 218–222.

⁴² On the campaign of Manuel Komnenos in Anatolia, see Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 139–142; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 11, pp. 101–103, see also Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Manuel 61; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 39f.

⁴³ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 22, pp. 128–130.

⁴³ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 22, pp. 128–130.

Isaakios Komnenos, the second son of Anna Dalassene, and Eirene, a cousin of the empress Maria of Alania.⁴⁴ This union was an initial approximation between the Doukai and the Komnenoi, for Anna Dalassene still clearly resented the Doukai.⁴⁵ Moreover, Michael VII and Nikephoritzes did not trust the Komnenoi. The tasks given to them are evidence of this suspicion.

After 1071, the city of Antioch became increasingly estranged from Constantinople. As in the rest of the Byzantine Eastern provinces, Antioch was affected by Turkish invasions at the end of the 11th century. Consequently, the imperial authority lost their preeminence to local figures such as Philaretos Brachamios, who used the situation to extend his influence over the city.⁴⁶ He was a military officer of Armenian origin to whom Romanos IV gave the command of the Byzantine troops stationed on the Eastern frontiers.⁴⁷

After the deposition of this emperor, Brachamios became independent by not acknowledging Michael VII. He then strove to take Antioch, where Philaretos Brachamios already had many supporters, including the Patriarch Emilianos.⁴⁸ Isaakios Komnenos was sent to counterbalance Brachamios' influence in Antioch and to repress local opposition to the Byzantine authority. In Antioch, Isaakios had to comply with the emperor's order to arrest the patriarch, resulting in a bloody insurrection.⁴⁹ In addition to Brachamios' political offensive and local resistance, the *doux* of Antioch had to tackle the constant danger represented by the Turks. During his term as *doux*, Isaakios was captured in combat by the Turks. His brother-in-law, Konstantinos Diogenes died whilst accompanying him as a subordinated officer. In order to buy his release, the

⁴⁴ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 1, pp. 142–144.

⁴⁵ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, III, 6, p. 220.

⁴⁶ On Philaretos Brachamios, see Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, pp. 145–147, 191, 201, 204, 232, 244, 249, 285f.; Dédéyan, *Les Armenians*, pp. 5–357; Cheynet, *Les Brachamioi*, pp. 398–409; Hoffmann, *Rudimenten*, p. 5–11, 78–80, 117f., 128, 133f.; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Philaretos, 101; Seibt, *Philaretos Brachamios*, pp. 281–295; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, pp. 263–265.

⁴⁷ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, *Historia*, 132f. On Isaakios Komnenos' term as *doux* of Antioch, see Hoffmann, *Rudimenten*, p. 9; Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat (969–1084)*, pp. 244, 250, 255–256, 261; Todt/ Vest, *TIB 15/1 Syria*, pp. 219–220, 571; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 68f.

⁴⁸ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 693, 705; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 301, see also Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 121–124; Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 95–97; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 225–227, 398–404; Korobeinikov, *Raiders and Neighbors*, p. 708; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 42–44.

⁴⁹ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 28–29, pp. 200–206; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1004b.

people of Antioch had to collect a significant amount of money. This surely contributed to the worsening of the relations between Isaakios and the city.⁵⁰

Alexios Komnenos' position was no less complicated, for Michael VII ordered him to repress the insurrection of Roussel de Bailleul. After rebelling and then acclaiming the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas as emperor, Roussel was defeated and captured by the Turks. Later, he was released after his wife paid his ransom. Roussel then went to the domains he established in Cappadocia with a seat in Amaseia. The emperor sent Nikephoros Palaiologos and six thousand soldiers against him, but due to lack of payment, they deserted Palaiologos and defected to Roussel. After this sequence of failures, Michael VII sent Alexios Komnenos with few resources and soldiers.⁵¹ By using guerrilla tactics, trickery and bribery, Alexios was able to arrest Roussel de Bailleul in Amaseia and repress the resistance offered by his supporters. Indeed, Alexios almost failed because the local population appeared to prefer to be ruled by Roussel than by the imperial authority represented in the person of Alexios. In order to break the resistance of the local population, he staged the blinding of the rebel leader.⁵²

We see that both Komnenoi were handpicked to address the most complicated problems. Both Michael VII and Nikephoritzes must have considered the situation in Antioch and Cappadocia to be so hopeless that it would be worth sending the distrusted Komnenoi. In case of success, the problems would have been solved. Yet in case of failure, Isaakios and Alexios would have been discredited and could have been accused of cowardice, incapacity, and even treason. Nikephoros Bryennios states that Anna Dalassene told Alexios to refuse the task of fighting Roussel de Bailleul.⁵³ Although it is likely that Bryennios invented this intervention, it is in the text for a good reason. Bryennios wanted to portray his perspective of the Komnenos-Doukas relationship during the rule of Michael VII.⁵⁴ Thus, in putting these words into the mouth of Anna Dalassene, Bryennios informs us that the relationship between these two families was one of distrust by that time. If we accept the chronology established by Paul Gautier, the

⁵⁰ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 29, pp. 204–206.

⁵¹ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 19, p. 182; Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1004a.

⁵² Anna Komnene, 1, i–iii; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 713; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 199f; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 20–24, pp. 184–194; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 161, 18, 24;

⁵³ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 20, pp. 184.

⁵⁴ Michael Angold sees in Nikephoritzes an ally of the Komnenoi, for their appointments to these military commands coincided with the ascension of Nikephoritzes as chief minister of Michael VII. However, Bryennios gives us clear report of a strained relationship between the emperor and the Komnenoi, see Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, p. 123.

campaign against Roussel took place in 1075, when Alexios was 18 years old. It was a very early age for such responsibility.⁵⁵

The same happened with Isaakios. Considering the pressures to the imperial authority in Antioch and the resources available to him, Isaakios Komnenos was given an impossible task. Although he did his best to keep Antioch under Byzantine authority, it fell to Philaretos Brachamios as soon as Isaakios Komnenos was called back to Constantinople.⁵⁶

After Andronikos Doukas returned seriously injured from his failed campaign against Roussel de Bailleul in 1074, Ioannes Doukas decided to connect his family with the Komnenoi. He achieved this by arranging an engagement between Eirene, his granddaughter and Andronikos' daughter, and Alexios Komnenos. Although Alexios seemed to be enthusiastic about the project of marrying into the Doukas family, the union was resisted by Anna Dalassene and the emperor. The imperial opposition lasted until 1077, when permission was finally given after Ioannes Bryennios' attempt to besiege Constantinople.⁵⁷

This marriage is considered as a sign of a political alliance between these families and its inner contradictions are hardly assessed.⁵⁸ Scholars who come to this conclusion do this in hindsight, in knowledge of the following events, namely Alexios Komnenos' seizure of power with the support of the Doukai in 1081. Yet the rapprochement between the Komnenoi and the Doukai could not have had such an intention, for it happened early in the reign of Michael VII, in 1074, before the military uprisings that led to his deposition. Hence, this marriage union must be understood in its contemporary context.

Actually, the relations between the Doukas and Komnenos families were marked by suspicion and resentment. At first, relatives and allies, the Komnenoi and the Doukai went apart after Isaakios I made Konstantinos Doukas his successors. This increasing estrangement led to the rapprochement between the Komnenoi and the Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes, who named Manuel Komnenos *domestikos* of the East and married his son to Theodora Komnene. The enmity between the Doukai and the Komnenoi were so strong that Anna Dalassene kept her loyalty to Romanos IV even

⁵⁵ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 19, p. 183, fn. 5. According to Varzos, Alexios Komnenos was born in 1057, Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, I, p. 87.

⁵⁶ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 29, p. 299. See also Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 95–97; Todt, *Region und griechisch-orthodoxes Patriarchat (969–1084)*, p. 244, 261.

⁵⁷ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, III, 6, pp. 218–222; 13, p. 234; Polemis, *Notes*, pp. 68f;

⁵⁸ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 370; Polemis, *the Doukai*, p. 14; Magdalino, *Innovations in Government*, pp. 150f.

after his defeat in Manzikert and his following deposition. At the same time, both lineages were struggling to survive in the unstable political context of their times, which hindered the implementation of long-term strategies. As consequence the hegemony of Nikephoritzes, Ioannes Doukas and his descendants had lost imperial favor, thus they were forced to leave Constantinople. Moreover, the rebellion of Roussel de Bailleul was a catastrophe for this branch of the Doukas family. Ioannes Doukas had to become a monk after his candidacy for the imperial title failed. Andronikos Doukas, Ioannes Doukas' heir as the head of the family, was heavily wounded during combat in 1074 and never recovered. He died years later in 1077. His other son, Konstantinos, had also met an early death in 1075.⁵⁹ The family nucleus around Ioannes Doukas was, consequently, unprotected. The political position and even the safety of his descendants could be assured through the union with a promising young officer.

Alexios Komnenos probably saw the obvious advantages of associating himself with the reigning dynasty even though this family branch had a troublesome relation to the reigning emperor. In addition, Alexios may well have developed a more pragmatic approach towards the Doukai than his mother had, for he was very young when Isaakios I resigned and his family was removed from power. Consequently, it is more reasonable to understand this union as a first step to ease the resentment and as a deal which benefited both sides and addressed their momentary needs. Ioannes Doukas found a protector for his family after his sons, Andronikos, deceased and Alexios Komnenos established a connection with the imperial family, becoming indirectly related to the emperor himself.

Although we cannot exclude the possibility that both families sought imperial power, it seems that the plan was not possible for either the Komnenoi or the Ioannes Doukas' branch during Michael VII's reign. Ioannes Doukas was already a failed rebel and the Komnenos brothers did not try to seize power during the confusion following Michael VII's renunciation. Alexios decided to support Konstantios Doukas instead. The ascension of Nikephoros III, an old man whose reign was not expected to be long, opened possibilities for young ambitious officers like Alexios Komnenos and for the Doukai. Yet since the union between Eirene Doukaina and Alexios Komnenos was not originally intended to take over the imperial throne, the accession of Alexios Komnenos

⁵⁹ Polemis, *The Doukas*, p. 59f.

to power exposed the internal contradictions and the unsolved conflicts between the two families.⁶⁰

The brothers Komnenos enjoyed the favor of Nikephoros III Botaneiates. He appointed Isaakios Komnenos as *sebastos* after he was called back from Antioch. Moreover, the emperor granted him properties and chambers in the imperial palace.⁶¹ Alexios was also granted properties and the title *nobelissimos*⁶² and then *sebastos*.⁶³ According to Zonaras, Nikephoros III named the Komnenos brothers his successors, but this is probably an exaggeration and a reflection of the Komnenian propaganda.⁶⁴ His victories over Roussel advanced Alexios Komnenos' reputation as a young and successful commander. On this account, Nikephoros III sent him to repress the insurrections led by Nikephoros Bryennios and Nikephoros Basilakes, now, however, with more soldiers and resources. Alexios was successful in both cases.⁶⁵

As a consequence of the Komnenoi triumphs and the imperial favor, Isaakios and Alexios Komnenos were envied by many in the court, especially by the emperor's favorites, Borilos and Germanos.⁶⁶ It is difficult to achieve a clear picture of these two influential individuals during the reign of Nikephoros III because of the defamation campaign promoted by the historiography influenced by Komnenian propaganda.⁶⁷ Borilos, *protoproedros* and *ethnarches*, and Germanos were described as Botaneiates' slaves (*douloi*).⁶⁸ Due to the emperor's favors towards the Komnenoi, Borilos and Germanos were reported as becoming envious. Consequently, they continually conspired against Alexios and Isaakios Komnenos. Their intrigues served as pretext for the outbreak of the Komnenos rebellion.

⁶⁰ On aristocratic marriage unions, see Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, pp. 36–51.

⁶¹ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 29, p. 298f.

⁶² Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 288; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 180.

⁶³ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 299; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 183.

⁶⁴ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 727.

⁶⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 1, iv–ix; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 720–724; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 284–304; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 180–184; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 4–28, pp. 264–297. On the rebellion of Nikephoros Bryennios, Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 104, pp. 83f; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1035, 1036, 1037a. On the rebellion of Nikephoros Basilakes, Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1037, 1038, 1039; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 108, pp. 86f.

⁶⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, i–iv; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 726f; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, Preface, pp. 58–60; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 185f.

⁶⁷ Dias, *Nikephoros III*, pp. 297–320.

⁶⁸ Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Boril 61, Germanos 101; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, pp. 47–49, 105f.

2.3. Observations on the Political Careers of the Doukai and the Komnenoi until 1081

Considering his advanced age at the moment of his takeover, it was clear that the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates was an *interregnum*. Jean-Claude Cheynet identifies four groups during his rule. The “Phrygians” supported a certain Synadenos, an emperor’s relative; the supporters of Maria of Alania defended the succession rights of Konstantinos Doukas, the son of Michael VII; the party of Ioannes Doukas supposedly supported the ascension of any Doukas; and Anna Dalassene’s party wanted either Isaakios or Alexios Komnenos as emperor.⁶⁹

In general terms, I agree with Cheynet’s classification, but the Doukas family branch led by Ioannes Doukas was not willing to support any member of the family. Each group strove for the interests of their own members and if they found any kind of compromise with another branch of the family, they had independent political goals. Moreover, the imperial court was overcrowded with male *porphyrogennetoi*: Konstantinos Doukas, the son of Michael VII, Konstantios Doukas, the youngest son of Konstantinos X, and Nikephoros and Leon Diogenes, the offspring of the marriage between Romanos IV and Eudokia Makrembolitissa.⁷⁰ Since Nikephoros III was linked with no other party that had already held the imperial title, he had to be more generous than his predecessors were. Therefore, he granted the Komnenoi high positions in his government and strove to find a compromise with the Doukai. However, his deposition through cooperation between the two branches of the Doukai and the Komnenoi showed that his position was the weakest of all mentioned groups.

The Doukai as well as the Komnenoi represented a new form of making politics in Byzantium that gave weight to the kinship, establishing its foundation upon these relations. The Byzantine family had the *oikos*, the house or household, as its bedrock. This concept went beyond the scope of the domestic dwellings and became a social institution, which ran throughout the whole society. The aristocratic *oikos* had its center in the nuclear family, but relatives, servants, slaves, members of the retinue and eventually weaker and smaller *oikoi* also belonged to it. This institution granted their members support and a sense of belonging in contexts, like in the provinces, in which

⁶⁹ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 354.

⁷⁰ On Konstantinos Doukas, see Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Konstantinos 62; Polemis, *The Doukas*, pp. 60–63; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, pp. 55–57. On Konstantios Doukas, see Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Konstantios 61; Polemis, *The Doukas*, pp. 48–53; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, pp. 57–60. On Nikephoros and Leon Diogenes, see Ch. 4.1.1.

the imperial power was hardly felt and foreign enemies and internal conflicts made life unsafe. In politics, the *oikos* enabled stable connections for the composition of factions in a time in which ancient forms of securing political support, namely court titles and their hierarchy, including the stipends attached to them and their symbolic and social distinction, were in decline. However, there were limitations, for the *oikos* was based on personal and direct relationships with the nuclear family. The death of the *oikodespotes*, the head of the household, led necessarily to the disappearance of an *oikos* and eventually the founding of another although the widow could become the head of a household. Anna Dalassene was a clear example. Moreover, confiscations and political downfalls disrupted networks based on the *oikos*.⁷¹

The Doukai and the Komnenoi were not the first ones to use the customs and the values of the *oikos* as a model for the exercise of power and the establishment of factions. In the time of Michael IV, the Paphlagonian, his brothers and relatives played a significant role in his reign. Yet Michael V, the nephew and successor of Michael IV, exiled Ioannes *Orphanotrophos*, his uncle. He also ordered the blinding and castration of his relatives. Konstantinos X ruled in a similar form by appointing his brother, Ioannes Doukas, as *kaisar* and crowning each of his sons as co-emperors. The fact that the Doukai could not hold power for long afterwards reveals the above-mentioned weakness of the *oikos* as a political fundament. As emperor, Konstantinos X was the head of the household. When he died, his brother Ioannes Doukas attempted to take over this role, for his nephew Michael VII was young, inexperienced and supposedly weak.⁷² Initially, Ioannes Doukas had everything in grip and was able to force the widow Eudokia Makrembolitissa never to marry again.⁷³ Ioannes Doukas started to lose influence when Eudokia broke this promise, marrying Romanos IV Diogenes and begetting children with him. When Michael VII came under the influence of Nikephoritzes, the emperor gradually removed Ioannes Doukas and his sons from the court. If the estrangement between Michael VII and Ioannes Doukas, then it is possible to conclude that there was a rupture in the *oikos*, whose head had once been Konstantinos X. Even though Ioannes Doukas tried to hold the family together, he could

⁷¹ On the aristocratic *oikos*, see Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, pp. 69–129, 215; Kazhdan/ Constable, *People and Power*, p. 32f; Magdalino, *The Byzantine Aristocratic Oikos*, pp. 92–111; Neville, *Authority*, pp. 66–98, 136–137; Patlagean, *Les débuts*, pp. 92–111. On confiscations, see Ch. 1, fn. 9.

⁷² Attaleiates, *Bryennios and Zonaras* describe Michael VII as such, see Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 708; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 182; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 1, pp. 144–145.

⁷³ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 684–687; Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 92.

not hinder Konstantinos X's sons from forming their own factions in order to pursue independent power claims.⁷⁴

Among the Komnenoi, internal conflicts can hardly be observed until 1081. After the abdication of Isaakios I Komnenos in 1059, the siblings Komnenos stuck together under the leadership of their mother Anna Dalassene and could enforce relatively harmonious actions. Isaakios and Alexios Komnenos never appeared to compete with one another. During the rebellion that resulted in the acclamation of Alexios I Komnenos as emperor, the brothers Komnenos displayed impeccable cooperation undoubtedly with Anna Dalassene's contribution.

Not only the internal family disputes resonate in the following period; there were also unresolved issues between the Komnenoi and Doukai, which presented challenges to the reign of Alexios Komnenos. At the time of Isaakios I's seizure of power, the Komnenoi and the Doukai were not only political allies but also related. Yet this connection was embittered by the resignation of Isaakios I. The transmission of imperial power to Konstantinos Doukas and not to Ioannes Komnenos irritated Anna Dalassene deeply. The consequent disgruntlement and mistrust could not be neutralized by the marriage between Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina, for it was still evident during the reign of Alexios I.

The identification of the hero in the *History* of Attaleiates has produced a controversial discussion. At a first sight, Nikephoros III Botaneiates seems to fulfill this role.⁷⁵ Yet it has been proposed by Dimitri Krallis that the ambiguities in the praise towards this emperor create the impression that the hero of the work was actually Alexios Komnenos.⁷⁶ Despite the validity of this discussion, my impression is that the main characters of the *History* of Attaleiates are not its heroes, but its villains, a part clearly played by the Doukai. The *History* by Attaleiates until the report about the reign of Nikephoros III has a clear pessimistic tone and the members of this family represent the decaying mood that Attaleiates was trying to express. According to the author, they rose to power at the cost of the whole *politeia*. Although Attaleiates' assessment was conditioned by his political alliances, he can only be accused of exaggeration.

⁷⁴ So far this division has been ignored by the scholarship, only to be recently assessed by Larisa Vilimonović in her recent monograph on the *Alexiad*, see Vilimonović, *Structure*, passim.

⁷⁵ Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur I*, pp. 382–389; Kazhdan, *The Social Views*, pp. 23–86; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 135–143; Vryonis Jr., *The Blinding of Romanus IV*, pp. 3–14.

⁷⁶ Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, pp. 214–228.

At the same time, it is not correct to say that the Doukai ruined the Empire because of their moral deficiencies. At the end of the first chapter, it was demonstrated how the interests of the ruling groups were in conflict with the interest of the Byzantine polity. The Doukai did their best to hold power and this led to the bankruptcy of the imperial finances, the decay of the title hierarchy and military defeats. Accordingly, the marriage between Eirene Doukaina and Alexios Komnenos was a consequent attempt to ensure the political survival of the Doukai. Even though this union became the bedrock of the Komnenos dynasty, this consequence was accidental. The objectives were originally in a short-term to assure the Doukai a position through the connection with a talented man, who appeared to have a brilliant future.

2.4. The Rebellion of the Komnenoi in April 1081

In his *Pouvoir et Contestations à Byzance (963–1210)*, Jean-Claude Cheynet understands the political struggles in Byzantium as an aristocratic competition, in which aristocratic families contended for power and wealth.⁷⁷ He denies the division of the aristocracy between a military and a civil party, proposing a geographically based classification. Cheynet acknowledges that the support brought by kinship was limited to brothers and first cousins and that matrimonies did not assure cooperation, being often indeed a tool which attenuated hatred between families. However, he still approaches the political struggles of the period in terms of aristocratic groups or extended families, that is, everyone who carries the same family name and their dependents.⁷⁸ In this survey on the opposition during Alexios's reign, the limitation of that approach becomes very clear. If kinship was paramount for the formation of factions and the assurance of political support, why did the Diogenai and Taronitai with whom Alexios Komnenos' sisters were married not support the Komnenos' seizure of power? Why did Michael Taronites conspire with Nikephoros Diogenes although he had no family connections with him? Why did Maria of Alania also conspire?⁷⁹ Why do we find an "obscure" Doukas (Exazenos Doukas) as a participant in the Anemas conspiracy? These loose ends cannot be answered convincingly by Cheynet's approach. To make it clear: neither his analysis nor his conclusions should be denied completely. Kinship bonds and

⁷⁷ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 475.

⁷⁸ On Cheynet's position on family solidarity, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 263.

⁷⁹ His argument that Konstantinos Doukas, although he was gradually removed from succession after the birth of Ioannes Komnenos in 1087, retained a friendly relationship with the Komnenoi while Maria of Alania took part in Nikephoros Diogenes' rebellion "car elle n'avait plus rien à perdre à un changement dynastique" is insufficient and not substantiated by the sources, Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 370.

the aristocratic appetite for estates and offices were indeed important in Byzantine politics. However, they have clear limits and gradations, which were not fully considered in Cheynet's survey.

The accounts of conspiracies during Alexios Komnenos' reign are rather short and described from the emperor's perspective, even in critical accounts such as those of Zonaras and Choniates. Therefore, much information is lacking, such as motives and names of other participants. The conspirator's lists are generally very abridged or complemented with generalizing descriptions such as "several members of the senate" or "numerous officials". Anna Komnene, our main source, used this device on a number of occasions and once, in her account of Nikephoros Diogenes' murder plot, she consciously erased names from her report.⁸⁰ For those reasons, the rebellion of the Komnenoi in 1081 provides the starting point for a study of the opposition to Alexios I. Due to the foundational aspect of this conspiracy, we have plenty information which enables us to develop of a deep analysis of the workings of opposition in Byzantium. This event was already explored in numerous studies, but a survey of Alexios' seizure of power is still relevant as a case study for the following oppositional expressions.⁸¹ There is enough information about the insurrection, as well as about its consequences and resulting traumas, to be able to assess the points of conflict between the opposing groups and the emperor, the composition of the opposition to Nikephoros III, as well as their actions, their strategies, and their goals.

In her account of the rebellion that brought her father to power, Anna Komnene describes the actions of Alexios and Isaakios Komnenos as reactive. She builds a narrative in which her father and her uncle were faithful servants of the Emperor Nikephoros III and were favored by him though relentlessly pursued by his envious servants Borilos and Germanos. However, other accounts refute Anna Komnene in this aspect. Zonaras attributes the rebellion to long cherished ambitions for the imperial title, besides the defamations spread by Borilos and Germanos.⁸²

⁸⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, viii, 4. Frankopan has a hypothesis for this, but it shall be addressed above, see Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 1–34.

⁸¹ Here a list of surveys that cannot be considered complete: Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 124–129; Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 21–50; Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia*, pp. 144–146; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp. 309–312; Lillie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 32–35; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 55–63; Mamankakis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας*, pp. 90–136; On feminist approach of Alexios' takeover: Hill, *Actions*, pp. 45–62; Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, pp. 132–141.

⁸² Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 727. On the characterization and instrumentalization of Borilos and Germanos for the justification of the usurpation of the Komnenoi, see Dias, *Nikephoros III*, pp. 307–315.

More interesting is an addendum to the *Material for History*, attached after the death of Alexios I, in which the author defends Alexios I's seizure of power incisively. The author claims that the throne was taken from his family when a stranger – Konstantinos X – was chosen to succeed Isaakios I and not a family member. Therefore, Alexios Komnenos accepted the acclamations by the troops because he was his uncle's rightful heir.⁸³ In this preface, there are factual mistakes, such as confusing the *porphyrogenetoi* Konstantios Doukas and Konstantinos Doukas, as well as affirming that Alexios Komnenos was elected emperor in Adrianople, when he was actually acclaimed in Schiza, in Thrace. For that reason, this allows us to state that this apologetic introduction was not written by Nikephoros Bryennios. It is unlikely that he would make such basic factual mistakes, especially because later in the text Bryennios established a clear difference between Konstantios and Konstantinos Doukas. Gautier cannot convincingly explain this late defense of Alexios' coup d'état.⁸⁴ However, it clearly demonstrates that the illegality and the uncanonical aspect of Alexios Komnenos' ascension were still a target for criticism even in later times.⁸⁵

In addition to the long cherished Komnenos family's ambitions of returning to the imperial power, other claims from various branches of the Doukas family also existed. Considering the political instability of the time, Konstantinos X ruled for a long period, establishing one of his sons as his successor, who, in his turn, also had a relatively long reign, even though both emperors, Konstantinos X and Michael VII, lacked any remarkable achievements. However, it was enough to form a group of supporters to defend their dynastic claims. In 1081, however, the Doukas family was divided into two interest groups due to the above-mentioned political events during the reign of Michael VII: the faction supporting Ioannes Doukas and the faction supporting Konstantinos Doukas, the son of Michael VII. By 1081, *porphyrogenetos* Konstantinos Doukas was only a boy; it was his mother Maria of Alania who defended his succession

⁸³ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, Preface, pp. 62–66. See also, Stankovic, *Uvod*, pp. 137–148.

⁸⁴ Gautier, Introduction, in Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, p. 47: “Porquoi un courtisan a-t-il éprouvé la besoin de justifier, si longtemps après les événements, l'usurpation du Comnène? Nous ne disposons pas du moindre argument pour expliquer la confection de ce plaidoyer”

⁸⁵ It is also interesting that Niketas Choniates, who wrote at the end of 12th century and the beginning of the 13th, reports that one of the reasons why Alexios did not choose his son-in-law Nikephoros Bryennios as his successor instead of his son Ioannes Komnenos was that the seizure of power was still an issue for him. Niketas says that he had to appoint his son as his successor in order to overcome the stain brought by the shameful and illegal form through which he took power. The question of whether this happened or not is less important than the perception that seizure of power by Alexios was a burden for the Komnenoi even more than a hundred years after it happened, Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*, John2, pp. 5,20–6,5.

claims. She was ready to risk public shame by marrying Nikephoros Botaneiates to protect her son's position though her husband Michael VII was still alive. Besides, she did not hesitate to conspire against her new husband when he started to show a preference for his own relative, a Synadenos.⁸⁶

Anna Komnene reports that the insurrection was devised and executed by two family groups: the immediate family of Alexios Komnenos (Alexios himself, his brother Isaakios Komnenos, and his mother Anna Dalassene) and the immediate family of the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas (the *kaisar* himself, Michael and Ioannes Doukas, his grandchildren and the brothers of Eirene Doukaina, their mother Maria of Bulgaria and their brother-in-law Georgios Palaiologos). Moreover, it had the participation of Maria of Alania, Gregorios Pakourianos, and Konstantinos Humbertopoulos.⁸⁷ Since Alexios Komnenos was the *domestikos* of the *scholai*⁸⁸, he had the support of the Thracian and Macedonian *tagmata*, which after the defeat in Manzikert probably encompassed the majority of the Byzantine standing army,⁸⁹ and Turkish troops enlisted by Ioannes Doukas when he was on his way to meet the rebels.⁹⁰

This plot involving two families, two important officials, a former empress, and a significant part – if not the majority – of the remaining Byzantine military forces could not have been a desperate move organized in a hurry, as Anna Komnene tried to convince her readers. Some planning was surely required to organize this rebellion. The Komnenoi – for at the beginning it was not clear who was to be the emperor: either Alexios or Isaakios – had to reach a compromise by promising Pakourianos the office Alexios Komnenos had at the time (*domestikos* of the West) and Maria of Alania that he would crown her son as co-emperor.

After Alexios and Isaakios escaped from Constantinople, a sequence of very well organized actions took place, leaving Nikephoros III and his supporters with their

⁸⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, ii, 1: ἦν δὲ τηλικαῦτα Συναδηγὸς τις ἐξ ἀνατολῶν ὀρμώμενος, ἐκ γένους λαμπροῦ, τὸ εἶδος ὠραῖος (At that time there was a certain Synadenos who was originally from the East, from illustrious stock and of graceful appearance); Skylitzes *Continuatus* reports that Nikephoros III had a Synadene as niece, the daughter of Theodoulos Synadenos, who was married to the *kral* of Hungary, but once the *kral* died, she was brought back to Constantinople. Therefore, it is possible to assume that this “certain Synadenos” mentioned by Anna Komnene was also a child of Theodoulos. Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 185.

⁸⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, iv, 6–8.

⁸⁸ Anna Komnene called Alexios interchangeably *meas domestikos*, *domestikos of the scholai* and *domestikos of the West*. It is not possible to know whether she does that due to lack of memory or to point out that Alexios held all these offices simultaneously, Birkenmeier, *The Development*, p. 156, fn. 51; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, pp. 95–117; Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, 135–154.

⁸⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, iv, 2; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 729. See also Kühn, *Die byzantinische Armee*, 206–209.

⁹⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vi, 8.

hands tied. Alexios and Isaakios Komnenos joined with their loyal forces and marched through Thrace and Macedonia to receive (or to force) acclamation from its cities.⁹¹ At the same time, Alexios Komnenos sent a coded message to Ioannes Doukas, who had retired to his private house with his grandsons Michael and Ioannes, Eirene's brothers, who were clearly waiting to act.⁹² Meanwhile, other simultaneous actions took place in Constantinople. Directly after the flight of Isaakios and Alexios Komnenos, the women of the family left the house to seek refuge in an annex of Hagia Sophia in order to guarantee sanctuary in case the rebellion failed.⁹³ Maria of Bulgaria, Eirene's mother, simultaneously put pressure on her son-in-law, Georgios Palaiologos, to join the rebellion.⁹⁴ He hesitated because his father, Nikephoros Palaiologos, was loyal to Nikephoros III Botaneiates.⁹⁵ Georgios Palaiologos' support was important because of the immense fortune that he had stored in the monastery of Kosmidion, which he used to finance insurgent troops. It was complemented by the money confiscated by Ioannes Doukas from Byzantios, a tax collector he met on his way to meet Alexios and Isaakios.⁹⁶

Money alone did not assure support for a rebellion against an emperor. Soldiers had to be persuaded to follow their commander in actions that were essentially unlawful and could result in shedding their own blood in the combat against fellow-Byzantines. Therefore, when all the supporters of the rebellion were encamped in Schiza, near Constantinople, a strong commotion arose among the rebels to decide who should be acclaimed: Alexios or Isaakios Komnenos.⁹⁷ Anna Komnene describes the efforts undertaken by Alexios' in-laws because of which he had a greater number of supporters. Isaakios acknowledged this, dressing his brother with purple shoes.⁹⁸

⁹¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vi, 10; Ioannes Zonaras, *Synopsis Historion*, 3, 727. It was an important step in many revolutions as observed by Cheynet and an important element for the Roman republican idea of *consensus universalis* as observed by Kaldellis. Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 167; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, p. 158f.

⁹² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vi, 4f.

⁹³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, v.

⁹⁴ On Georgios Palaiologos, see Cheynet, *Les premiers Paléologues*, pp. 137–141; Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, pp. 233–235; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Georgios 61; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 99–105.

⁹⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vi, 1–3. On Nikephoros Palaiologos, see Cheynet, *Les premiers Paléologues*, pp. 133–135; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Nikephoros 101.

⁹⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vi, 6. On the importance of money to finance rebellions, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 163–165.

⁹⁷ On this assembly in Schiza, Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, p. 297

⁹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vii, 1–4, Anna Komnene reports that Isaakios Komnenos also had supporters, but does not name them. He was married to a cousin of Maria of Alania, a princess of Georgian stock; can we therefore assume that Pakourianos was one of his supporters due to Isaakios' marriage connections? His *typikon* showed that he was much attached to his fellow countrymen, for he

According to Anna Komnene, an important element of this political dispute was a speech to the troops held by the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas. She states that he pointed out that if Alexios were elected emperor, he would reward each of them with offices and prizes according to their merits, and not randomly, as other commanders did. Alexios, he said, was a soldier like them, who knew the hardships of war, for he was the “darling of Ares (*areifilos*)”.⁹⁹ Although direct speeches are a literary *topos* adopted from classical historiography, it is possible to assume that the *kaisar* used similar arguments to convince the troops, maybe not with these words and not in only one speech. After the rebels united to support Alexios Komnenos, they marched towards Constantinople.¹⁰⁰

Anna Komnene reports that Nikephoros III and their supporters tried to organize resistance to this rebellion in the meanwhile, but the fast moves by the partisans of the Komnenoi paralyzed them. Romanos Straboromanos and Euphemianos were sent by the emperor to arrest the womenfolk of the Komnenoi and failed.¹⁰¹ Apparently, the emperor did not have troops outside Constantinople because no help was sent against the rebels. Alexios’s soldiers were able to enter the city after German mercenaries who were responsible for a sector of the Theodosian Walls were bribed.¹⁰²

Afterwards, Nikephoros III sent an envoy with the fleet, carrying orders to bring Nikephoros Melissenos and his troops, encamped on Damalis, on the other side of the Bosphoros, to Constantinople. Georgios Palaiologos aborted that plan by arresting the envoy.¹⁰³ Nikephoros Palaiologos and Borilos advised Botaneiates to take the chance while Alexios’ soldiers were spread in the city and to order the Varangian guard and the Chomatene soldiers to slaughter them.¹⁰⁴ Nikephoros III rejected the proposal, sending Nikephoros Palaiologos to propose a truce with the rebels and to offer Alexios the co-

stipulated that the monks in his monastery should be chosen primarily from his kin and countrymen, but never among the Byzantines (Ρωμαῖοι). Gautier, *Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos*, pp. 105–107. On Gregorios Pakourianos, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Gregorios 61; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 112–115.

⁹⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vii, 2.

¹⁰⁰ On the function of speeches in Byzantine historiography, Lillie, *Reality and Invention*, pp. 181–184.

¹⁰¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, v, 5. On (Romanos) Straboromanos, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Romanos 61; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 282f; As possible father of Manuel Straboromanos, see introduction, fn. 164. On Euphemianos, see Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 83.

¹⁰² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, x, 2–4; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 727f. On the German mercenaries (Nemitzoi) see Todt, *Deutsche in Byzanz*, p. 651f.

¹⁰³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, xi, 1–6.

¹⁰⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, xi, 7. The Chomatene troops escorted Nikephoros Botaneiates during his march to Constantinople in the time of his rebellion, Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 4, pp. 264–266.

emperors. When this offer was rejected at the insistence of Ioannes Doukas, Nikephoros III followed the advice of the Patriarch Kosmas and abdicated.¹⁰⁵

After this short overview of the historiographic reports on the rebellion that brought Alexios Komnenos to power, it is possible to reflect on the political struggles and the exercise of political opposition in Byzantium at the end of 11th century.

The sequence of events described above relies heavily on the report by Anna Komnene. Despite being shorter, Zonaras' account also gives important information, which at least in its factuality does not contradict Anna Komnene's version. We have already mentioned that bias may have affected her justification for the Komnenos rebellion. Borilos and Germanos were depicted as villains who conspired against Alexios and Isaakios, pushing them into illegal acts. This account is not believable considering the great amount of preparation needed to organize an enterprise such as a rebellion to seize the throne.¹⁰⁶

Vilimonović recently suggested that the important role given by Anna Komnene to the family of Ioannes Doukas might signal that she saw her father as a usurper who depended on the legitimacy brought by the Doukai to have a claim for the imperial throne. According to this interpretation, Anna Komnene would have intended to present herself as the heir of the Doukas imperial claim.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, from the moment in which the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas was invited to participate in the rebellion, Anna Komnene's narrative gives a strong emphasis on the actions of his family, reporting many developments from their point of view. However, it is possible to interpret the evidence differently. Leonora Neville has convincingly proposed that Nikephoros Bryennios relied heavily on a lost report by Ioannes Doukas to write many events in his work.¹⁰⁸ It is, therefore, perfectly possible that this hypothetical source went further, reporting the beginning of Alexios' reign, probably ending with the seizure of power of Alexios Komnenos, which was the climax of the *kaisar*'s political career. Afterwards, Ioannes Doukas disappears from the *Alexiad*. Even his death is not reported.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, xii.

¹⁰⁶ See Ch. 2, fn. 67.

¹⁰⁷ Vilimonović, *Structure*, pp. 166–182. Anna's attachment to her mother's family and its influence on her account of these events were already considered by Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel Komnenos*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁸ Neville, *John Doukas*, pp. 168–188.

¹⁰⁹ Vilimonović accepts the possibility that Anna Komnene might have had a pro-Ioannes Doukas report at her disposal, but the choice of using it would have been her active authorial decision. Although I do not necessarily disagree with her hypothesis, it is important to remark that Anna was writing about things that happened a fifty to seventy years before her time and, therefore, it is hard to imagine that she had a large

Moreover, Zonaras indirectly confirms the important role the Doukai played in the rebellion. He says, “Alexios was proclaimed emperor; he was preferred over his older brother because the soldiers were more attached to him as a more successful general and because they were drawn to his side with haste and promises by those around him”.¹¹⁰ This short report confirms in general lines the account given by Anna Komnene about the events in Schiza and the efforts made by the Doukai to promote Alexios’ candidacy. One could argue that the uncertainty about when the *Epitomē Historiōn* was written implies that Zonaras had access to the *Alexiad*. However, despite the lack of consensus in scholarly debates concerning the dating of Zonaras’ work, it is accepted that his report is independent of the *Alexiad*.¹¹¹

The rebellion that took place between February and April of 1081 was a purely military coup lacking support inside Constantinople. In contrast to the great military rebellions of the 10th and 11th century, which involved a great number of thematic and tagmatic forces, the rebellion of 1081 seemed to be carried out by a smaller number of troops. Alexios I Komnenos was by that time *mezas domestikos* and had the Byzantine western *tagmata* at his disposal. Probably, after the battles in the rebellions of Nikephoros Bryennios and Nikephoros Basilakes, their numbers must have been greatly reduced. The Turkish mercenaries recruited by Ioannes Doukas complemented his forces, but most likely Alexios did not have a great army. This development is not new, for Nikephoros Botaneiates himself rebelled against Michael VII with the support of only 300 Chomatene soldiers and Turkish allies.¹¹² Nevertheless, there was a significant difference between Alexios’ coup and the preceding one, by Nikephoros III Botaneiates in 1078. The latter was also a military insurrection but enjoyed a wide support in Constantinople because Michael VII Doukas and Nikephoritzes were very unpopular. Botaneiates was proclaimed emperor in the Hagia Sophia by the assembled archbishops led by the Patriarch Kosmas with – according to Attaleiates – the full support of the people.¹¹³

Alexios Komnenos, however, enjoyed little support within the city. It was limited to his female relatives, the Patriarch Kosmas and the German mercenaries

range of first-hand testimonials about these events to choose the one that best corresponded to her bias, see Viliimonović, *Structure*, p. 182.

¹¹⁰ Ioannes Zonaras, *Synopsis Historion*, 3, 727: καὶ ἀναγορεύεται βασιλεὺς ὁ Ἀλέξιος, τοῦ μείζονος προτιμηθεὶς ἀδελφοῦ, ὅτι τε προσέκειντο τούτῳ οἱ στρατιῶται μᾶλλον ὡς στρατηγικωτέρῳ καὶ ὅτι σπουδῆ τε καὶ ὑποσχέσεσι παρὰ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν μεθειλικύσθησαν.

¹¹¹ On the scholarly discussions on Zonaras, Ch. i.iii.iii.

¹¹² Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, III, 17, p. 243.

¹¹³ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 255–272.

bribed to allow the rebel troops to get in. He was only proclaimed emperor in Constantinople by his own soldiers after their invasion. Although Skylitzes Continuatus informs us that the senators were not happy about the influence exercised by the emperor's henchmen, Borilos and Germanos, Nikephoros III still enjoyed strong support in the city, for the senators and the people attempted to organize some resistance. However, according to Zonaras, they were "men from the rabble and for the most part ignorant of war or rather assembled from the marketplace and from urban crowds"; therefore, they could not resist the attack.¹¹⁴ Zonaras expressly says that when Alexios' troops entered the city, they behaved as if in an enemy city by plundering, killing and attacking senators.¹¹⁵ Anna Komnene confirms this account although she tries to absolve him.¹¹⁶ As we will see in the following lines, it was a traumatic event that created an institutional breach, which reverberated until the last days of his reign and even after.

Other commanders who had rebelled before Alexios I may have tried to force the inhabitants to proclaim them emperors, but none of them had dared to launch a direct attack against the city in order to seize it by force. This breach has not been appreciated by modern scholars sufficiently.¹¹⁷ It is generally solely considered with regard to the senatorial opposition that Alexios Komnenos suffered.¹¹⁸ This violent and illegal act was, for that matter, an open political statement.¹¹⁹ In previous rebellions and seizures of power, candidates took great pains to ensure the approval of the leading figures of the city (senators, patriarchs, clergy, rich merchants, etc.) and its people, granting them ample concessions. These strongly constrained the emperor's field of action and his ability to implement necessary reforms. If the emperor tried to act more freely, he risked destroying his expensive support. This is what happened to Alexios Komnenos's uncle. Therefore, Alexios Komnenos violent seizure of Constantinople was

¹¹⁴ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 728: σύγκλυδες ἄνθρωποι καὶ πολέμων οἱ πλείονες ἀδαεῖς ἢ μᾶλλον ἐξ ἀγοραίων ἀθροισθέντες καὶ πληθὺς δημότιδος.

¹¹⁵ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 729, 730: οὐδὲν ἄμεινον πολεμίων πρὸς τοὺς ὁμοφύλους διατιθέμενοι.

¹¹⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2, x, 3.

¹¹⁷ Hans-Georg Beck lists this event together with others in which insurgent military commanders had to negotiate terms with the city's inhabitants. It is difficult to consider the bribing a mercenary foreign unit to sneak into Constantinople as negotiating with the citizens. Beck, *Senat und Volk*, pp. 30–35. In his study of the relationship between the Alexios I and the people, Dionysios Mamankakis fully appreciates this event as an always present stain that the emperor tried to erase through his many actions, see Mamankakis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας*, *passim*.

¹¹⁸ Angold, *Belle Époque*, pp. 613–615; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, p. 309–312; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 37–39; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 206–210, 319.

¹¹⁹ According to Johannes-Ralph Lilie, Alexios intended to state that he would not tolerate opposition and that it would be repressed with hard measures, Lilie, *Macht und Ohnmacht*, p. 36.

designed to break this practice. This gesture meant Alexios would build his support on different terms.

The female role in these events is also noteworthy.¹²⁰ Maria of Alania helped the Komnenoi with their search for legitimacy and conspired with them. Maria of Bulgaria put pressure on her son-in-law to adhere to the Komnenian cause. The role of Anna Dalassene is interestingly portrayed in Anna Komnene's account. She assigned her grandmother a role without great political consequences: to find a safe haven for the women of the family. Yet Anna Komnene reported this episode thoroughly.¹²¹ Perhaps it was a way of acknowledging Anna Dalassene's importance without risking the honor of her father and her uncle by portraying them as grown-up men who were controlled by their mother.¹²² Alexios' desire to meet Anna Dalassene and hear her advice when his troops were scattered through the city and Nikephoros III was about to abdicate could also be interpreted as a subtle form that Anna Komnene found to acknowledge her grandmother's importance.¹²³

The group of ringleaders appears to have been reduced to the closest relatives of Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina, such as their brothers, mothers, and grandfathers. The *syngenike boetheia* observed by Cheynet¹²⁴ seemed to be limited to their immediate family. Nikephoros Melissenos was the only person related by marriage to Alexios who was mentioned with exception of the Doukai. Melissenos rebelled simultaneously in Anatolia and proposed that Alexios share the Empire with him since he was not willing to fight his relative.¹²⁵ Alexios Komnenos' sisters were married to the families Taronites and Diogenes, but there is no evidence of their participation.¹²⁶

Maria of Alania's involvement with the conspiracy was solely aimed at the protection of her son's interests rather than by loyalty to Eirene Doukaina, who saw Maria of Alania as a menace to her own position, hence as neither a relative nor an ally.

¹²⁰ Dudek, *Pęknięte zwierciadło*, pp. 349–352; Hill, *Actions*, pp. 50–55; Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, pp. 78–83; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 55–58.

¹²¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2, v.

¹²² The relationship between Alexios Komnenos and the women, especially his mother, is controversial. Lemerle, strongly based in Zonaras, denounced the "*faiblesse*" of Alexios towards the women. However, new studies, some with feminist orientation, propose different approach to this issue, Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, p. 298.

¹²³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2, xii, 1.

¹²⁴ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 262.

¹²⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2, viii, 2. Previously, Alexios Komnenos rejected the appointment for the command of the imperial forces against Nikephoros Melissenos when the latter rebelled. According to Bryennios, he feared a defeat due to numerical disadvantage and that, in case of defeat, he would be accused of treason by the Botaneiates' entourage due to their family connections. Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 31, p. 300.

¹²⁶ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 732; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 6, pp. 85–87.

Curiously, Alexios Komnenos seems to have been the only link between the partisans of Ioannes Doukas and Maria of Alania. It is also intriguing that the success of the rebellion appears to have heavily relied on the actions of the relatives of Eirene Doukaina. As it was discussed above, the importance assumed by the Doukai in Anna Komnene's account of the rebellion might have been a result of her loyalty to her mother and her former fiancé. However, Zonaras corroborate that Alexios's supporters were important so that he was preferred over his brother and then acclaimed as emperor. Moreover, the influence of the Doukai on the reign of Alexios I and their staunch resistance to any emperor's attempt to diminish their influence indicate that the Doukai considered the imperial power as much as their own as Alexios'.

Alexios Komnenos' seizure of power satisfied the short-term ambitions of the co-conspirators. The Komnenoi regained the imperial power. Ioannes Doukas was able to instate his progeny on the throne. Maria of Alania assured the claims of her son, at least temporarily. Nevertheless, these short-term ambitions were in conflict with long-term ones. The new emperor Alexios I had to deal with the fact that his mother hated Ioannes Doukas and his family. However, the newly crowned emperor knew that he could not get rid of his mother or of the Doukai. The latter knew that the role of the emperor's family was more important than that of the empress'. This entailed they would have to struggle for their position in the new regime. Maria of Alania could also expect that the imperial couple would beget their own *porphyrogennetoi*, who would compete with her son, but under more favorable conditions. Consequently, in addition to the strong opposition from non-members of the newly established consortium, the Alexios I had to face contradictory positions in the core of his own faction.

3. 1081–1091: Building an Internal *Status Quo* in Face of External Threats and Internal Discontentment

This chapter is an assessment of the first ten years of Alexios I's reign. It was a turbulent period. Alexios Komnenos took power on the eve of a major Norman invasion. Furthermore, the Empire was still dealing with Petchenegs and Turks roaming, ransacking and destabilizing the Byzantine provinces. Therefore, Alexios had to face the same dilemma as his predecessors: how could he establish a stable regime and make the sacrifices necessary to tackle the immediate problems? There were few resources to finance a Byzantine reaction. This situation forced Alexios to adopt polemic measures. Furthermore, as said in the previous chapter, the removal of Nikephoros III Botaneiates addressed the short-term interests and worries of the parties involved with the deposition, but now it was necessary to form a functioning government. Among members of the faction, suspicions grew and contradicting interests shocked. Consequently, the first ten years of his reign were a time for adaptation for the participants of the rebellion of 1081, whose roles were still uncertain. Eventually, dissension emerged out of the disputes for favorable positions and of the conflicts of interest. As a consequence, the boundaries between political support and opposition were not quite clear in this period. The opposition was similarly undetermined. Anna Komnene portrays a picture of general dissatisfaction with Alexios I. Expressions of opposition were hesitant and lacked proper leadership. While they were able to present challenges to his government, they were not strong enough to overthrow it.

3.1 The imperial concessions

Surveys of the patrimonial regime established by Alexios Komnenos and expanded by his successors are numerous, but they tend to come to similar conclusions.¹ After he took power, Alexios created new titles, which he distributed to his brothers and brothers-in-law. They superposed the old court hierarchy with the exception of the rank of *kaisar*, which was only subordinated to the emperor himself and to the newly created dignity *sebastokrator*, granted to his brother Isaakios Komnenos. Old court titles not only forfeited their precedence, Alexios also canceled the stipends – the *rogai* –

¹ See Ch. i.i.

attached to them.² However, Alexios was doing nothing new here. Nikephoros Bryennios reports that the payments were discontinued in the reign of Nikephoros III due to the bad financial situation of the state.³

Since he lacked resources, Alexios I rewarded his supporters with tax revenues from imperial estates. Isaakios Komnenos received these concessions in the region of Thessaloniki, Adrianos Komnenos on Kassandra Island, Ioannes Doukas and Nikephoros Komnenos in the Hierissos region, Gregorios Pakourianos in the Smolene region and Leon Kephalas in Hellas and Thessaloniki.⁴ Similar concessions were also given to the emperor's opponents. Nikephoros Melissenos was granted Thessaloniki for residence (*eis katoikian*) with all the taxes and contributions that were supposed to be paid to the emperor (*choregian chrematon*) and the title *kaisar*.⁵ Nikephoros Diogenes received the governance of Crete with the obligation of living there.⁶ Alexios I also acknowledged Theodoros Gabras as the lord of Trebizond.⁷

The most prevalent position among scholars is that Alexios I Komnenos reorganized court titles, created new offices and distributed concessions to family and relatives by marriages to acquire political or military support. This resulted in a patrimonial state and consequently, compromised the Byzantine state's capacity to act effectively.⁸ However, the list of the individuals who received these concessions weakens this hypothesis. As we mentioned, three of them were Alexios I's competitors or enemies: Nikephoros Diogenes, Nikephoros Melissenos, and Theodoros Gabras. Among the emperor's direct family, Nikephoros Komnenos never held any important political or administrative role⁹ and we will see that Alexios I could not trust Adrianos

² Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 733.

³ Ch. 1, fn. 126.

⁴ Bartusi, *Land and Privilege*, pp. 132–152; Gerhold, *Église et aristocratie laïque*, p. 76; Smyrlis, *The Fiscal Revolution*, pp. 602f.

⁵ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 732.

⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 9, vi, 3.

⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 8, ix, 1. On Theodoros Gabras in Trebizond, Bryer, *A Byzantine Family. The Gabrades*, pp. 165–187; Chalandon, *Essai*, p. 146, 241; Hoffmann, *Rudimente*, pp. 21–31, 82–85, 114, 119f, 129, 135; Janssens, *Trebizonde en Colchide*, pp. 56–58; Jeffreys et al, *PBW, Theodoros 6003*; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 48–50; Skoulatos, *Les Personnages*, pp. 295–298; Vlyssidu et alii, *Η Μικρά Ασία*, pp. 297, 329, 462 nr. 7 e 486 fn. 3.

⁸ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 124–129; Birkenmeier, *The Development*, pp. 148–154; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, pp. 15–40; Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia*, pp. 100–102; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 42–46, 110–112; Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 187; Treadgold, *A History*, pp. 682–684.

⁹ Nikephoros Komnenos was made *sebastos* and *droungarios* of the fleet when Alexios Komnenos took power. Although the *droungarios* was formerly the commander of the fleet, Nikephoros did not seem to exercise any commanding function during his bother's reign, see Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 3, iv, 2; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 732. On Nikephoros Komnenos, see Jeffreys et al, *PBW, Nikephoros 116*; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 232f; Varzos, *Η γενεαλογία των Κομνηνών*, 1, pp.

Komnenos.¹⁰ Gregorios Pakourianos died some years after Alexios's takeover and could not provide political support in accordance with the concessions he had received.¹¹ The only true supporters of Alexios to be found in the list, who actively defended his rule and made important contributions to his reign, are his brother Isaakios Komnenos, Leon Kephalas and Ioannes Doukas. Kostis Smyrlis conjectures that their main aim was to reward officials for their service to the state, as Alexios's predecessors did with the *strategoï*, but with movable wealth. The bad condition of the finances forced Alexios to find a new solution, hence the land concessions. They not only entailed exploratory rights but also some administrative, judicial and defense functions. These did not interfere with imperial hegemony, for the emperor could intervene in local issues if it served his interests and the concessions could be naturally canceled.¹² Frankopan proposes one additional reason. In his views, concessions were a reward for those who helped Alexios in his seizure of power.¹³

These interpretations explain the land grants made to his direct family and relatives by marriage, but how should we interpret those made to his competitors? The concession of Thessaloniki and its hinterland to Nikephoros Melissenos was a compensation for surrendering his imperial claims. An interesting detail is that Melissenos not only enjoyed the revenues from Thessaloniki but was also expected to live there (*eis katoikian*). The concession to Nikephoros Diogenes was presented in a similar fashion. He was awarded the government of Crete to serve as dwelling place (*eis endiaitema idion*). In the case of Theodoros Gabras, it was unnecessary to emphasize that he should stay in Trebizond since his interests lay there and not in Constantinople. Granting Gabras the title *doux* of Trebizond was, therefore, an imperial acknowledgement of his local influence and of the fact that Alexios could do nothing about it, at least for the moment. Nevertheless, he assured Gabras loyalty by keeping his son at court as a hostage.¹⁴

118–120. On the office of *droungarios* of the fleet, see Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 205–211; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, pp. 144f, 155f;

¹⁰ Frankopan conjectures that Adrianos Komnenos was involved in the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes. The viability of this proposition will be addressed in the following chapters, see Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 23–28. On Adrianos Komnenos, Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, pp. 231–233; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 16, 114–117.

¹¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, xiv, 3; Gautier, *Le typikon du sébaste Grégoire Pakourianos*, pp. 5–145.

¹² Smyrlis, *The Fiscal Revolution*, pp. 606–609.

¹³ Frankopan, *Kinship*, p. 3–5.

¹⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 8, viii, 1–6.

Seeing the three examples above, we see that in those cases the concessions given by the new emperor to his former and potential adversaries to Nikephoros Diogenes and Nikephoros Melissenos were not only an appeasement policy but also a glorified and very expensive form of exile. That Alexios had to make such compromises in the first years of his reign is evidence of the weak position in which he found himself.

3.2. Alexios and Constantinople: Traces of a Difficult Relationship¹⁵

Another hypothesis is that the titles and concessions that Alexios I made to his family and supporters were also intended to alienate the senators as well as the rest of the aristocracy who were not related to the emperor.¹⁶ This is sometimes addressed negatively as if Alexios I were the representative of conservative strata from Byzantine society that was not content with the “progress” made in Byzantium in the preceding years. It supposedly resulted in a Byzantine humanism and a meritocratic policy, which brought the sons of merchants and shopkeepers into the senate.¹⁷ However, this hypothesis only stands if we accept the division of the Byzantine aristocracy into two clear groups: the civilian and military aristocracy. Scholars have already questioned this division as an explanation for the political struggles during the 11th century. Yet, it has been difficult to assess the problem of the political opposition to Alexios I and to understand his political strategy in different terms.¹⁸

Earlier we posed that the violence of Alexios I’s seizure of power was a political statement through which he intended to establish a relationship with Constantinople, especially with its elite, which differed from that of his predecessor. We also already pointed out that if Isaakios I’s contemporaries knew how and where this emperor failed, Alexios I and his family must have known it too. Accordingly, it is interesting to observe to which extent the policies of both emperors were similar and to which extent they differed. Isaakios I and Alexios I were aware of the appalling condition of the imperial treasury and adopted similar measures: both canceled stipends of the titleholders and both confiscated lay and ecclesiastical properties. Nevertheless, after Isaakios I had achieved a decisive military victory over the forces loyal to the emperor Michael VI, he negotiated with representatives of the Constantinople leading groups. In

¹⁵ This chapter summarizes arguments presented in Dias, *Taming*, pp. 380–394.

¹⁶ Haldon, *Social Elites*, p. 192; Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 226.

¹⁷ Clucas, *The Trial of John Italos*, pp. 74–177; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp. 209–312; Krallis, *Democratic action*, pp. 35–53.

¹⁸ See Ch. i.i

that he followed the century-old political tradition, which awarded the acclamation by the people and Senate of the imperial city a great importance, leaving these groups inside Constantinople the last word, Isaakios I put himself in a fragile position, as his predecessors had done. Consequently, he was not able to confront their interests. Isaakios I was probably not aware of that contradiction that caused his downfall. Alexios I, in his turn, had learned the lesson. Thus, his violent coup as well his first actions as emperor – cancellation of the *rogai* and of many measures taken by Nikephoros III¹⁹ – were not just one more episode of hereditary rivalry within the aristocracy. It was a conscious political decision, the consequence of the empirical knowledge gathered in the short time in which the Komnenos family held imperial power.²⁰

The violence of his seizure of power had repercussions on the relationship between the emperor and Constantinople as well as with its elite. Beyond the illegal and uncanonical character of his accession to power, the confiscations in consequence of real or invented conspiracies or of the so-called *epibole*, the cancellation of the *rogai*, and the concessions to his family were also the cause for the emergence of a staunch opposition. The Constantinopolitan elite seemed to reject Alexios Komnenos for the most part, but their identity, their movements, their position and their goals are very difficult to trace, for our major sources only mention them indirectly. Whenever someone was at odds with the emperor, senators, and members of the aristocracy or, in more general terms, the aristocratic *oikoi* were involved. A number of unnamed senators supported the rebellions staged by Pounteses in 1083²¹ and Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094.²² Anna Komnene says about the conspiracy of the Anemas brothers around 1100

¹⁹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 731.

²⁰ In the English summary of his doctoral Thesis, Vlada Stankovic denies the connection between Alexios' seizure of power and the short reign of Isaakios I, his uncle, for it was too short to present any dynastic or ideological basis. Hence, Alexios I had to create his legitimacy from scrap. Stankovic, *Komnini u Carigrady*, p. 307; Ralph-Johannes Lilie also tries to detach Alexios I's policy towards the Constantinopolitan elite from this binary division of the Byzantine aristocracy by affirming that Alexios' actions (violent coup, cancellation of the *rogai*) were not actions against the senate, rather against the meritocratic policy of his predecessors. However, Lilie affirms that Alexios I had acted against the meritocracy to satisfy and seek support among the "provincial aristocracy", and he does not understand it as administrative and ideological action, as I propose here, Lilie, *Des Kaisers*, pp. 37–39. See also Introduction by Gautier in Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, pp. 62–66.

²¹ Neither Anna Komnene nor Ioannes Zonaras named the supposed conspirators or ringleaders of this conspiracy. However, Cheynet connects it with the plot led by Pounteses, Otton, both Frankish officers, and Léon Baasprakanites whose property was transferred to Leon Kephalas. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 6, iv, 1; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 736; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 84; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1091a; Guillou/ Svoronos, *Actes de Lavra I*, pp. 244–247; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 268–269.

²² See Ch. 4.1.2.1.

that the brothers convinced the leader of the Senate, Ioannes Solomon, to take part in the conspiracy, promising that they would make him emperor if they were successful.²³ According to Anna Komnene, the man was extremely stupid and the Anemades did not intend to make him emperor. They only coveted his money. The Anemades also managed to win the support of the former eparch Konstantinos Xeros and of a certain Skleros.²⁴ This is the only case in which Anna Komnene names senators or non-army officers among the conspirators. Anna Komnene also mentions in several passages enigmatic murmuring and gossip in the corners of Constantinople.²⁵ This image of secretive enemies besieging Alexios while he strove to put the Empire back at its feet is an important part of Anna Komnene's characterization of her father. It also, however, says a great deal about the relationship between Alexios Komnenos and the elite of Constantinople, and the practice of political opposition inside the city.

The senators and civilian officials did not limit their opposition to Alexios I Komnenos to taking part in conspiracies to dethrone this emperor but also participated in other oppositional movements against him that were not aimed at his deposition. This is true for the controversies of Ioannes Italos and Leon of Chalcedon. Both episodes

²³ On the dating of the Anemas conspiracy, see Ch. 4.3.

²⁴ During the 10th century, the Skleroi were at the top rank of the aristocracy as one of the most important families of the Empire and had a strong presence in the army. After the defeat of their rebellion against Basileios II, they lost much of their influence, although Romanos Skleros still managed to be an important supporter of Konstantinos IX Monomachos, whose mistress, Maria Skleraina, was Romanos' sister, Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p. 71–73, 76–71. This particular Skleros, who was involved with the Anemas conspiracy, must also have been a senator, since he was not listed among the army officers (οὗτοι μὲν οὖν ἦσαν τοῦ στρατιωτικοῦ καταλόγου πρωτεύοντες) who were the initial members of the plot, whom Anna Komnene calls ἕτεροι τῶν εὐγενῶν, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 4; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp. 105f. Moreover, a text from July 1082 mentions a certain Michael Skleros, incumbent judge in the *themata* of Thrace and Macedonia, Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1083; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp. 99–102. There is a refutation that mentions a Nicholaos Skleros, *megas droungarios* of the watch, which used to be a military post and had with time become a civil one, Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1113.

²⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 4, iv, 1: As Alexios left to fight the Normans in August 1081, he left Constantinople in Isaakios' hand to keep the peace and repress “dissenting voices from the enemies” (τινὲς λόγοι ἀπάδοντες ἐξ ἐχθρῶν); 5, ii, 6: Leo, the bishop of Chalcedon, was influenced by members of the bureaucracy to resist the appropriations of ecclesiastical property proposed by Alexios I (ὡς δ' ἐπὶ πλέον πρὸς τοὺς βασιλεῖς ἐθρασύνετο χαιρεκάκοις ἀνδράσι πειθόμενος, ὅποιοι πολλοὶ τότε ὑπῆρχον τοῦ πολιτεύματος, εἰς τοῦτο παρανυττόμενος καὶ πρὸς ὕβρεις καὶ βλασφημίας ἀκαίρους ἐτρέπετο); 6, iii, 1: When the emperor returned to Constantinople in December 1083, he found the city taken by whispers against him because of his appropriations (ἐκεῖνος δὲ πρὸς τὴν βασιλίδα τῶν πόλεων ἐπάνεισιν. οὐκ ἔλαθε δὲ τοῦτον τὰ κατ' αὐτοῦ ἐν τριόδοις τὲ καὶ γωνίαις ὑποψιθυριζόμενα, ἀλλ' ἀκούων ἐπιτρέσκειτο τὴν ψυχὴν, ὅτι μὴ τοσοῦτον εἰργασμένος πολλαπλασίω τὰ στόματα τῶν συκοφαντούντων εἶχεν ἑαυτῷ περιχαίροντα (ἐκεῖνος γὰρ χρείας κατεπειγούσης καὶ κοσμικοῦ κλύδωνος ἐξ ἀπορίας τῶν βασιλικῶν ταμειῶν πρὸς τοῦτο ἀπέβλεψε καὶ ὡς δάνειον ἐλογίζετο, ἀλλ' οὐχ' ὡς ἄρπαγμα ἢ τυραννικῆς χειρὸς ἐπιβουλῆν, ὡς οἱ διαλοιδορούμενοι λέξειαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ γνώμησιν οὕτως εἶχεν ὡς μετὰ τὸ κατορθῶσαι τοὺς ἐπικειμένους πολέμους ἀποδώσων ταῖς ἐκκλησιαστικαῖς τὸν ἀφηρημένον κόσμον αὐτῶν)); 12, iv: Anna Komnene begins her account of the Anemas conspiracy with an incident. An ancient statue of Apollo, which stood in the Forum of Constantine, fell. According to the author, some people interpreted this event as a premonition of the emperor's death. For a full discussion about this event, see Ch. 4, fn. 118.

were extremely complex and it is possible to address them from very different, but still valid and correct perspectives. However, for the moment, it is important to point out the presence of senators, civilian officers and members of unnamed aristocratic houses in the company of individuals at odds with the emperor, influencing them or being influenced by them. This was perceptible in the process against Ioannes Italos in March 1082. While the emperor faced the most complicated phase of the Norman invasion, he still found an opportunity to prosecute Ioannes Italos, the consul of the philosophers. This whole process had multiple angles, resulting in multiple conclusions about the hidden motivations behind the process.²⁶ Some of these approaches to the process against Ioannes Italos will be addressed here to begin with, followed by a general conclusion.

Unlike most events in Alexios' reign, whose investigation relies solely on the accounts of Zonaras and especially Anna Komnene, the process against Ioannes Italos is reported by other sources because of its ecclesiastical aspect. The Italos controversy is recorded in the account by Anna Komnene²⁷, process proceedings²⁸ and the *Synodikon of Orthodoxy*.²⁹ It is interesting to compare these accounts, chiefly Anna Komnene's and the proceedings. While the proceedings focused on the theological aspects of Italos' works and its effects in the clergy, Anna Komnene was concerned with the philosophical and political facets. She considers Ioannes Italos a disturbing influence and an unworthy successor of Michael Psellos. Anna Komnene mentions the long relationship that Ioannes Italos enjoyed with the Emperor Michael VII and his brothers, which once saved him from being condemned for heresy.³⁰ Later in her account, she names three of his disciples: Ioannes Solomon, a man named Serblias and one named Iasites, whom Anna Komnene accused of not being able to understand the subtleties of

²⁶ It was one of the actions taken by Alexios I to subdue the patriarchal clergy and to assert his hegemony over the Byzantine Church, see Angold, *Church*, pp. 50–54; Ioannes Italos was a supporter of Maria of Alania and connected with the Normans, desiring to reestablish Michael VII Doukas' line on throne. Therefore, Alexios wanted to repress this potential source of opposition, see Joannou, *Christliche Metaphysik in Byzanz I*, 3, pp. 9–31; The process against Italos is embedded in the struggles between two societal forces, the conservative group of the military aristocracy and the progressive streams supported by the civil aristocracy, see Clucas, *The Trial*; Gounaridis, *Le procès*, pp. 35–47; Browning, *Enlightenment and Repression*, pp. 3–23; The Italos affair was embedded in a long lasting dispute on the role of the state in the education, see Agapitos, *Teachers, Pupils and Imperial Power*, pp. 170–191, especially 184–187, 19; see also Trizio, *Trial*, pp. 463f.

²⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 5, viii–ix.

²⁸ Gouillard, *Le procès*, pp. 134–174.

²⁹ Gouillard, *Le Synodikon*, pp. 57–61.

³⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 5, viii, 5; Gouillard, *Le procès*, pp. 140–144.

the philosophical argument.³¹ Anna Komnene begins with the political accusations by claiming that Italos “stirred up many irrationals to rebellion and from his own disciples reestablished not few as tyrants.” She adds that she “could mention many if the time had not dimmed my memory.”³² Here, Anna Komnene resorts to a convenient memory loss in order to avoid compromising herself. Thus, it is clear that the controversy of Ioannes Italos had two ramifications: the philosophical-theological one was addressed in the proceedings and the political one was enigmatically hinted by Anna Komnene. On this occasion, it is possible to see the same group of senators, civil officers, and families from the middle rank of the aristocracy rallying around someone in conflict with Alexios Komnenos. Something similar was observed with the Leon of Chalcedon controversy, which began a little earlier than the process against Italos but dragged on until late 1094 or early 1095.³³ Anna Komnene states that the bishop of Chalcedon was encouraged by members of the bureaucracy to resist the emperor’s conciliatory approaches.³⁴

Perspective presented so far seems only to corroborate the existence of an opposition to Alexios I from senatorial, bureaucratic and less illustrious aristocratic elements in Constantinople. Obviously, this conclusion is not new. Actually, the most important thing here is not the social origin of the members of the opposition, but their motives. They did not oppose Alexios I because of the military character of his faction. It was rather a direct reaction against specific policies adopted by this emperor to face the contradiction between the necessity of assembling political support while addressing the financial issues and the defense of the Byzantine polity. Alexios broke with the generous policy which favored the bureaucracy and with the social promotion of enriched merchants, implemented lastly during the reign of Nikephoros III, who was an offspring of one of the most illustrious families with military tradition. Michael Attaleiates widely praises this emperor for promoting officials, returning ecclesiastical

³¹ Interestingly, the list of disciples who were forced to renounce the teachings of Italos in the proceedings of the process was different: Michael, the son of Matzos, Michael Doxopatres, Michael Tzeros, Ioannes, a relative of the metropolitan of Gangres and Eustratios, the *proximos* of the Saint Theodoros School in the district of Sphourakion, Gouillard, Jean, *Le procès*, pp. 158–160. All these were all deacons whose origins were not particularly illustrious. Only Michael Doxopatres seemed to hail from a more elevated background, for there are registers of other Doxopatres holding civil offices (φύλαξ τῶν νόμων, κριτῆ, μυστογράφῳ) and lower-rank titles (πρωτοπροέδρῳ, πρωτοσπαθαρίῳ ἐπὶ τοῦ Χρυσοτρικλίνου, μαγίστρῳ, πρωτοσπαθαρίῳ). φύλαξ τῶν νόμων, κριτῆ, μυστογράφῳ. Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Anonymus 20316; Demetrios 20110; Gregorios 20168; Philippos 20103; Theophanes 20112,

³² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, ix, 4.

³³ Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, pp. 280–284.

³⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, ii, 6. The crisis caused by Leon of Chalcedon will be tackled in the Ch. 3.4 and 4.2.

property confiscated by Michael VII, forgiving debts, returning commerce rights over the docks of Constantinople to their owners, and for passing a law that protected civil servants from the consequences of a change of regimes.³⁵ Alexios I Komnenos could have canceled many or even all these measures as a result of the financial difficulties. An evidence that the Constantinopolitan elite was not driven by class motives is the fact that they were always ready to support anyone who wanted to depose or simply create difficulties for this emperor, including other military officers from the same background as the Komnenoi, like Nikephoros Diogenes and the Anemas brothers. It becomes therefore evident that this opposition was not an expression of an aristocratic binary struggle, it was rather an ideological battle based on the following question: whom should the Byzantine state serve?

It is interesting that, during the reign of Alexios I, members of the Constantinopolitan urban elite were often found as supporters of oppositional movements, but not as leaders. Imperial power was, in theory, an elective post and accordingly anyone could occupy it, but nobility of birth (*eugeneia*) became an increasingly important legitimacy element during the eleventh century. In Byzantium, this aristocratic ideal was not clearly established, but it was linked with the presence of an individual's family or relatives in the administration or in the military. Offices in bureaucracy and in the military initially had the same importance, but families with a tradition in the army could achieve higher levels of *eugeneia* due to the stronger nepotistic traditions prevalent in that institution than in the bureaucracy. As a result, they ended up controlling Byzantine politics.³⁶

This process was clearly completed during the reign of Alexios I. Accordingly, the ringleaders in plots were usually army officers from families with strong traditions in that institution. Meanwhile, members of the senate or of families from the lower ranks roamed around these officers, seeking someone who could be an adequate candidate to depose Alexios Komnenos. Anna Komnene also describes Ioannes Solomon as being of illustrious origin (*geneous lamproteta*), but at the same time considers his imperial aspirations ridiculous and preposterous³⁷. It could have been a reflection on this development.

³⁵ See Ch. 1, fn. 125

³⁶ On this development, see Ch. 1.1 of this thesis.

³⁷ Anna Komnene on senators and bureaucrats, see Buckler, Anna Komnene, p. 280; Skoulatos, Basile, Les personnages, pp. 345–347.

Although a stark resistance by the civil elite existed from the beginning to the end of Alexios I's reign, resilience did not correspond with effectivity. Despite all conspiracies, Alexios I did not fall. In previous periods, this section of the elite was powerful because emperors recognized their influence. Afterward, removed from the group of the emperor's supporters and unable to present an acceptable candidate from their own ranks, they had to turn to any pretender. They hoped that one of them could take Alexios's throne and return to a policy similar to that of Nikephoros III, who opened the treasury and created laws that protected imperial servants.³⁸ Yet, this part of the elite was not able anymore to use their network of dependents in order to elect someone of their own choosing.

3.3 Pretenders and Foreign Enemies

The reign of Alexios I was contemporaneous to the establishing of a new order in the Mediterranean world. During Alexios I's reign, the nomadic Turkish tribes settled themselves in Anatolia and took the form of polities, such as the Seljuk Sultanate and the Danishmend Emirate. In the West, Byzantium increased its contacts with the Latin Christian world first through commercial relations with the Italian republics of Venice and Genoa, the Norman invasion led by Robert Guiscard, and afterwards, through the Crusades. Although these external developments lie outside our scope of the investigation, it is interesting to observe how external politics influenced in inner political struggles in Byzantium during Alexios I's reign.

In disputes between polities, lending support to internal opponents of the enemy was and still is common. In Byzantium, one form of doing this was when enemies of the Empire were accompanied by supposed pretenders or by deposed emperors during invasions. On the occasion of the Norman campaign in the Balkans between 1081 and 1085, Robert Guiscard brought with him a person who impersonated the deposed emperor Michael VII Doukas.³⁹ His son Bohemund did the same thing between 1107 and 1108 by bringing a pretender who claimed he was one of the sons of the emperor

³⁸ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 316–318; Zepos, *Jus I*, 283–287; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, Reg. 1047. Angeliki Laiou see this law as an attempt by Nikephoros III to secure the destiny of Borilos and Germanos after his death, see Laiou, *Law*, p. 151–185, about the legislation, p. 179.

³⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 1, xii, 8–10; 1, xv, 3–6; 3, ix, 1; 4, i, 3–4; On Pseudos-Michael VII/ Rektor, *Skoulatos*, *Les personnages*, pp. 273f.

Romanos IV Diogenes.⁴⁰ The Cumans acted similarly, bringing with them a man who claimed to be a son of Romanos IV Diogenes when they invaded the Empire in 1095.⁴¹ However, this strategy was not very effective. Although Anna Komnene reports that many joined Robert Guiscard when he arrived near Avlona, believing that the pretender was indeed Michael VII, Robert Guiscard could not achieve greater gains with this ruse.⁴² He presented the pseudo-Michael VII Doukas to the population of Dyrrachium, but the inhabitants did not acknowledge him, insulting him instead.⁴³ The pretender Diogenes went to Adrianople, and presented himself to Nikephoros Bryennios, the blinded former rebel, who did not recognize his voice.⁴⁴ The pretender Diogenes was able, however, to assemble a small number of supporters in Constantinople, but they may very well be the part of the Constantinopolitan elite who had earlier supported Nikephoros Diogenes's plot against Alexios I.⁴⁵

It was also possible to support your external adversary's internal oppositionists, but it is difficult to find in the sources reports of such external influence in internal politics in Byzantium. Yet there is suggestive evidence. In the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene links many conspiracies with wartime. Plots occurred after Alexios I returned from campaigns⁴⁶ or during campaigns.⁴⁷ These phenomena can be interpreted in two ways: first, the rebels took advantage of the emperor's frailty, especially when he had just faced a defeat; second, since we are dealing mostly with information provided by Anna

⁴⁰ Filium Diogenis augusti aliosque de Grecis seu Tracibus illustrium secum habebat; quorum querela de Alexio imperatore qui per prodicionem illis antecessorum stemmata suorum abstulerat, magis ad iram contra eum fecores Francos incitabat, Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI, XI, 12, p. 68f.

⁴¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, ii, 1–iv, 5; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 744. Peter Frankopan claims to have enough evidence to defend the hypothesis that the pretender was not a pretender after all, but really a son of Romanos IV. However, this suggestion will be discussed more thoroughly in a chapter dedicated to the Komnenoi-Diogenai relations, Frankopan, *Unravelling the Alexiad*, pp. 147–166

⁴² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 4, ii, 1.

⁴³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 4, i, 3–4.

⁴⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, iii, 4.

⁴⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, ii, 1–4.

⁴⁶ Anna Komnene reports Leon of Chalcedon and Ioannes Italos controversies directly after the defeat in Dyrrachium in 1081, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, i; The plot attributed to Pounteses is also framed by the Norman wars, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, iv, 1; The conspiracy of Ariebes and Humbertopoulos was reported within a few days after the victory in Levounion over the Petchenegs (April 29th 1091) (ὁ πολλὰι διήλθον ἡμέραι τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς τὰ ἀνάκτορα εἰσελεύσεως), Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 8, vii, 1; Also during the Norman wars, Alexios had to face an insubordination by the Manicheans established in Philippopolis. They refused to fight for the emperor after the defeat in Dyrrachium. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, iii, 2. On the insurgency of the Paulicians, see Ch. 5.4.

⁴⁷ In the mid-1090s, Alexios I was distracted from his preparations against the Serbs when his nephew Ioannes Komnenos was accused of conspiring against him. On the crisis resulting from the accusations made against Ioannes Komnenos, see Ch. 3.4.2; The Nikephoros Diogenes' conspiracy broke out also during a campaign against Serbs. On this conspiracy, see Ch. 4.1; The Aaron's conspiracy was revealed during the campaign against Bohemond, see Ch. 5.3.

Komnene, this may have been a rhetorical construction. She builds her narrative in such way that conspiracies, which were internal aggressions, were always connected with foreign invasions, which were external aggression. Anna Komnene consciously portrays her father as a hero fighting alone against foreign and internal enemies in order to restore the Roman might.⁴⁸ Zonaras demonstrates, however, that this connection between external and internal aggressions cannot be limited to the rhetorical construction of a loving daughter, for he also links the conspiracy attributed to Pounteses with the struggles against the Normans.⁴⁹

Although the image of Alexios Anna Komnene creates as the sole fighter against internal and external enemies is highly literary, it does not mean that it was untrue. Wars demand from a given society men and resources and accordingly have a strong impact on the support a regime enjoys. For Alexios I, it was not different. He took over the rule of a polity with serious financial problems facing foreign invasions and the measures he adopted exposed him to criticism and opposition. In addition, both Robert Guiscard and his son Bohemond were very willing to interfere with Byzantine internal issues.⁵⁰ Besides presenting spurious candidates to the imperial throne, Robert Guiscard could have influenced Byzantine internal politics indirectly by supporting Alexios's internal enemies or organizing a combined action with them. Anna Komnene only once accuses rebels of acting together with the enemies, when she associates the Anemas conspiracy with the coming Norman invasion led by Bohemond of Taranto.⁵¹ However, it is possible to notice external connections in the conspiracy discovered by Alexios I after his return from a decisive victory against the Normans in December 1083. Zonaras and Anna Komnene give accounts of this conspiracy, but none of them provided names or goals. However, it is very likely that two Normans officers, Pounteses and Otton, and an Armenian, Baasprakanites, participated in the plot, for there is an imperial order commanding the transfer of their property to Leon Kephalas in 1084 in consequence of their participation in a conspiracy against the emperor.⁵²

Anna Komnene registers that Pounteses was a Norman noble, who disembarked in Illyria with Robert Guiscard in 1081 in order to assist him in his offensive against the

⁴⁸ A similar image was presented in the *Muses*, see above pp. 23.

⁴⁹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 736.

⁵⁰ On the Norman-Byzantine relations during Alexios I's reign, see Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 129–131; Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 51–94; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 64–83; Shepard, *When Greek Meets Greek*, pp. 185–277.

⁵¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 3. Basile Leib shares Anna's opinion, see Leib, *Complots à Byzance*, p. 267. A full assessment of this episode in Ch. 4.3.

⁵² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 6, iii, 1.

Empire, but he was found conspiring with two others, Renaldos and Guillelmos, to defect to the emperor. While the two others were blinded, Pounteses managed to escape.⁵³ It means that little more than a year after defecting to Alexios I, Pounteses was involved in a plot against him. The space between these two events is not long enough for Pounteses to break off his connections with his Norman origins fully. Therefore, it is valid to conjecture that Pounteses acted as a double agent for Alexios and afterwards, for Robert Guiscard, maybe in order to receive a pardon. He could have acted as a connection between the Normans and some of Alexios I's internal enemies within the city.

This argument is strengthened by the fact that Anna Komnene, before giving her short account of this conspiracy, reports that the city was in uproar. It was supposedly taken by conspiratorial movements as result of the confiscation of church property by the emperor, but she informs us further that the arrival of Alexios I in Constantinople coincided also with her own birth (2 December, 1083).⁵⁴ This is important because the birth of a *porphyrogennetos* Anna Komnene, who was acclaimed and engaged with Konstantinos Doukas not long afterwards, afforded Alexios' rule a little more legitimacy, reinforcing the alliance between him and the Doukai.⁵⁵ This event also weakened Robert Guiscard's argument for his offensive against Alexios I. He was waging a costly using as *casus belli* his intention to reinstate Michael Doukas and reestablish the engagement between his daughter and Konstantinos Doukas.⁵⁶ Anna Komnene's birth, accordingly, made the emperor's position stronger and his internal and external adversaries weaker. Accordingly, the conspiracy of 1083 can be interpreted as a desperate move and a reaction to these new events.

The Normans also interfered in Byzantine internal issues by negotiating with Georgios Monomachatos, the *doux* of Dyrrachium. Nikephoros III appointed him to this post after its former holder Nikephoros Basilakes rebelled.⁵⁷ Monomachatos did not

⁵³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, v, 1.

⁵⁴ Anna Komnene narrates Alexios' return in 1083 twice: one after he dealt with the Paulicians facing strong opposition when he arrived and then when she reports of her own birth. Obviously, she did want to associate her birth with this low point in her father's reign, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, iii, 1 and 6, viii, 1.

⁵⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, viii, 3. On Konstantinos Doukas, his engagement with Anna Komnene and further political developments within the Komnenos–Doukas consortium, see Ch. 3.4.3.

⁵⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 1, x, 2; 1, xii, 2; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 714; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 170; On the engagement, Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 58, fn. 6.

⁵⁷ On Georgios Monomachatos, see Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 66–67; Frankopan, *The Imperial Governors of Dyrrakhion*, pp. 71–74; Jeffrey et al, *PBW*, Georgios 15002; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 298–301; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 97f.

acknowledge Alexios' ascension initially and then started to plot with Robert Guiscard and Konstantinos Bodin.⁵⁸ When the Normans were about to arrive, Alexios feared that Monomachatos would surrender Dyrrachium to Robert Guiscard and so sent his brother-in-law, Georgios Palaiologos, to that city as Monomachatos' substitute.⁵⁹ When Palaiologos arrived in the city, Monomachatos had already left to join Bodin for fear of retaliation. Alexios assured his safety through a golden bull and they were reconciled.⁶⁰

Norman connections, or the suspicion of this possibility, may have had an influence on the fate of Ioannes Italos. He was of Italian origin and had formerly been accused of conspiring with the Normans when he was sent there as the Byzantine envoy, probably to negotiate the terms of engagement between Konstantinos Doukas and Robert Guiscard's daughter. This made him an ideal target at the time of the process against him.⁶¹ Apart from his origins and the former accusation, there is not enough evidence to suggest a connection with the interests of Robert Guiscard, as in the above-mentioned cases. However, the process against Ioannes Italos caused submerged tensions and a general suspicion of everything connected with the Normans to erupt. These were the Norman wars, the confiscation of ecclesiastical property, the first concessions given to Alexios I's relatives, the cancellation of the stipends, the recent takeover by the Komnenoi, and the violence against the senators, in particular.

It is natural that Robert Guiscard, a cunning leader, would take advantage of the existing tensions. Byzantium had a long relationship with Southern Italy. It was the last of Justinian I's annexations still under Byzantine control. Important parts of it were still under Byzantine political administration ten years before Alexios Komnenos' seizure of power. The population of Southern Italy had a significant percentage of Greek-speaking Orthodox-Christians. During the reign of Alexios I, there were still a strong commercial, cultural and political exchange between Byzantium and Southern Italy.⁶² Consequently, it was natural that its new rulers, the Normans, would search for dialogue partners among disgruntled members of the Byzantine elite. These, in their turn, may have turned to Robert Guiscard to achieve their political goals.

⁵⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 1, xvi.

⁵⁹ Anna Komnene, 3, ix, 4. On Georgios Palaiologos, Ch. 2, fn. 94

⁶⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, xii, 1; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, Nr. 1070b.

⁶¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, viii, 5; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, Nr. 996b.

⁶² On Byzantine relations with Southern Italy, Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 48–55; Loud, *Byzantium and Southern Italy (876–1000)*, pp. 560–582; Theotokis, *The Norman Campaigns*.

If the data collected and assessed above does not present a conclusive argument, still it is persuasive. It becomes even more convincing when one observes that the internal political scene seemed to calm down after the Norman threat was neutralized through Robert Guiscard's death and the recovery of Dyrrachium in July 1085. After the conspiracy attributed to Pounteses in 1083 or 1084, there is only one known plot against Alexios until the beginning of the 1090s.⁶³ Hence, the Norman defeat and the temporary mitigation of internal opposition seemed to be simultaneous.⁶⁴

External meddling in Byzantine internal politics was only possible because the reigning emperors opened a channel through marriage alliances or granting high court titles to foreigners. Anna Komnene blames Michael VII for proposing the union between Helene and the *porphyrogenetos* Konstantinos Doukas, giving Robert Guiscard a pretext to attack the Empire and interfere with its internal affairs. Tzachas' ambitions of establishing an autonomous rule in Smyrna had its origin in a very similar policy. Tzachas was one of the Turkish emirs who established a domain in Anatolia in the aftermath of Manzikert in 1071. After Alexandros Kabasilas captured him during the reign of Nikephoros III, the emperor released Tzachas and gave him the title of *protonobelissimos*.⁶⁵

Tzachas was only one of the Turkish leaders benefited by Nikephoros III in his effort to assure his political position and fortify the Byzantine military forces, which were seriously weakened as a consequence of the defeat in Manzikert and the following civil wars. However, this act of introducing the Turkish emir into the Byzantine hierarchy legitimized Tzachas, or at least in his and his supporter's eyes, to aspire to

⁶³ The Leon of Chalcedon controversy, which lasted until 1094, was continuously troublesome for Alexios I. However, we will see that it was rather an ecclesiastical issue linked with power struggles within the Komnenos-Doukas consortium. There is also a reference to a conspiracy in a speech by Theophylaktos of Ohrid dated in 1088 because of specific events mentioned in it (conversion of Siaous and a Treaty with the Petchenegs). Theophylaktos does not give the identity of the conspirator but the author informs us that he endured the same punishment as accorded to Michael Anemas and his co-conspirators: public humiliation, being afterwards pardoned by Alexios I. The problem is that no other conspiracy is known in this period. Consequently, there are two options: it is only reported by Theophylaktos of Ohrid or the dating is wrong. Due to the extensive work done concerning the chronological order of reported events, the first option seems to be the most probable, see Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes*, pp. 68–96, 229–235; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1145.

⁶⁴ One can argue that temporary interruption of conspiracies against Alexios I can be attributed to the victory itself, since successes in the battlefield improved the legitimacy of a given emperor, but it was not a rule, for the even more decisive victory in Levounion against the Petchenegs in 1091 marked the most troublesome period of Alexios I's reign in which he faced four conspiracies in a ten year period (by Humbertopoulos, Ioannes Komnenos, Nikephoros Diogenes, and Michael Anemas).

⁶⁵ On Tzachas' promotion, Anna Komnene, 7, viii, 7. On Tzachas, Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, pp. 271–275; Chaladon, *Essai*, pp. 126–129, 146–148; Frankopan, *The First Crusade*, pp. 68–70.

imperial power, which he did in Smyrna sometime before 1091.⁶⁶ Thus, it is possible to observe a similar process in the cases of Tzachas and Robert Guiscard. Emperors (Michael VII and Nikephoros III) seeking military and political support gave foreigners (Robert Guiscard and Tzachas) access to internal affairs in Byzantium by introducing them into the Byzantine political stage, either through marriage alliance with the reigning dynasty or through granting of a high court title. The regime changes gave those benefited by this policy the pretext for claiming not only territories but also the imperial power. The difference between Tzachas and Robert Guiscard is that the latter had a greater effect on the Byzantine inner political struggles due to cultural and political proximity although in the end both failed.

3.4 The Komnenos-Doukas Relation: Struggle for Hegemony and Building of a *Status Quo*

As observed in the chapter dedicated to the rebellion of the Komnenoi in 1081, the Doukai, both the family branches of Ioannes Doukas and Maria of Alania, had an important role in the success of the coup, even if we consider all possible bias embedded in Anna Komnene's report. Therefore, the alliance between the Komnenoi and the Doukai is considered the kernel of Alexios I's regime. The approaches to the Komnenos-Doukas relations during his reign can be separated in two different general conclusions: either that the Doukai were satisfied with the position given to them by Alexios I⁶⁷ or that disputes existed.⁶⁸ In this latter group, we find works that tackle very interesting issues concerning the relationship between the Alexios I and his kin. Here, it is important to highlight the series of articles by Peter Frankopan on different aspects of the political background during the reign of Alexios I. Frankopan was able to present an elaborate image of the opposition to him.⁶⁹ Some of his conclusions will be adopted in the present work and others will not. A differing summary of the disputes within the emperor's kin group will be presented.

⁶⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, i, 2; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 736f; Gautier, Jean V l'Oxite, pp. 128–157; Gautier, *Défection et soumission*, pp. 215–227; Savvides, *Can We Refer?*, pp. 122–134; Alexander Beihammer also agrees that Tzachas adopted the imperial title, see Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, p. 273.

⁶⁷ Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 272–274; Magdalino, *Innovations in Government*, pp.152; Magdalino, *The Empire*, pp. 202–206; Polemis, *The Doukas*, p. 14; Stankovic, *Komnini u Carigrady*, pp. 299–314.

⁶⁸ Chalandon, *Essai*, p. 138; Gerhold, *Église et aristocratie laïque*, pp. 56–67; Gerhold, *Le “mouvement chalcédonien”*, pp. 87–104; Neville, *Heroes*, p. 177.

⁶⁹ See fn. 17 in introduction.

3.4.1 First Conflicts after the Seizure of Power in 1081

Each of the two remaining groups of the Doukas family had their own troubled history with the new emperor and with each other, beginning with the coup d'état. As the rebels took over the palace, Nikephoros III was deposed and sent to a monastery. Immediately thereafter, Alexios Komnenos invited Maria of Alania and her son to live with him and his family in the higher part of the Boukoleon. Meanwhile, Ioannes Doukas, Eirene Doukaina, her mother, brothers, sisters, and relatives by marriage lived in the lower part of the same palace. Then the gossip that Alexios I and Maria of Alania were having an affair and that the new emperor was planning to divorce his wife with whom he did not yet have any children in order to marry the *basilissa* Maria started to spread.⁷⁰

Although Anna Komnene tries to discredit the gossip, the reaction of the Doukai demonstrated that they must have taken it very seriously. Firstly, Georgios Palaiologos was sent to order the sailors of the imperial navy stationed in Constantinople to acclaim Eirene Doukaina as empress. However, members of the Komnenos-party (*hoi peri tous Komnenous*) tried to silence the acclamations. Outraged, Anna Komnene reports that Georgios Palaiologos said, “I myself have not toiled so hard for you, it was rather for the fore-mentioned Eirene”⁷¹ Simultaneously, Ioannes Doukas approached the Patriarch Kosmas in order to urge him not to lend his ears to Anna Dalassene. What she was asking of him, Anna Komnene does not tell us, but from the context, it is clear that Anna Dalassene was negotiating with him his substitution for Eustratios Garidas, a monk of her personal circle, and the possibility of a union between her imperial son and the former empress. After approaching the patriarch, Ioannes Doukas arranged Maria of Alania's depart from the Palace with her.⁷² These efforts achieved the expected results. Kosmas obeyed Ioannes Doukas. He said that he would only abdicate after he had crowned Eirene Doukaina. Kosmas, therefore, presented a dilemma for Anna Dalassene: either Eustratios Garidas becomes patriarch or Alexios divorces Eirene Doukaina. She chose to have Eustratios as patriarch.⁷³

⁷⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ii. Barbara Hill contends that the fact that Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina had no children until 1083 – although they had been married since 1078 – reinforces the argument that Alexios Komnenos really intended to divorce Eirene Doukaina, see Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, pp. 131f

⁷¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ii, 2: οὐ δι' ὑμᾶς τὸν τοσοῦτον ἀγῶνα ἀνεδησάμην αὐτός, ἀλλὰ δι' ἡν φατὲ Εἰρήνην.

⁷² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ii, 3.

⁷³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ii, 7.

Ioannes Doukas was also able to reach an agreement confirmed by an imperial golden bull with Maria of Alania. Accordingly, the *porphyrogenetos* Konstantinos should share the imperial title with Alexios. As co-emperor, Konstantinos was given privileges of an emperor such as to wear the purple boots and the crown, be acclaimed together with Alexios and sign the golden bulls under Alexios I's signature and accompany him during parades.⁷⁴ Zonaras complemented Anna Komnene's account by reporting that Alexios I granted Maria of Alania possession of the Hebdomon monastery and the Mangana Palace where she could live with Konstantinos with full imperial service.⁷⁵

This was the last episode in which Anna Komnene clearly reports disputes between her father's and her mother's family. However, the adjustments made in the first moments of the Komnenian rule obviously did not settle the conflicts of interest between Alexios I and the Doukai. The emperor's flirtation with the idea of divorcing Eirene Doukaina and resistance by the Komnenian partisans to acclaiming her as empress were clear signs to her allies that they should act very carefully and be ready to defend Eirene's position and consequently, their own at any moment. Moreover, Anna Dalassene presented Alexios with a difficult dilemma. She was an element of instability in the relation between his in-laws and himself, but at the same time, the newly crowned emperor was unable to remove his mother, at least at the beginning of his reign.

3.4.2 The Role of Anna Dalassene in Alexios I's Reign

The role Anna Dalassene played in her son's reign is controversial. Most surveys acknowledge her importance.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, it is a matter of discussion whether her

⁷⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, iv, 6. Dölger dated this edict in April 8th, 1081, see Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1064. A lengthy discussion on the Konstantinos' position as co-emperor will be developed in Ch. 3.4.3.

⁷⁵ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 733

⁷⁶ An exception is Ludwig Burgmann who considers the golden bull through which Alexios gave authority to Anna Dalassene unimportant, for it did not give her any legislative rights. Therefore, he recommends that one should not take the rhetoric appraisal of Anna Komnene at face value. Nevertheless, Burgmann ignores clear evidence in historiographical sources of the real power enjoyed by Anna Dalassene. Anna Komnene informs that her grandmother chose a person from her personal circle to be the Patriarch of Constantinople and proposed along with the *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos the appropriation of church property to finance the military efforts against the Normans. Furthermore, Anna Komnene attributes to her the decision of blinding a pretender that said he was one of Romanos Diogenes' sons, Burgmann, *Lawyers and legislators*, pp. 185–186; Burgmann, *Chrysobull gleich Privileg*, pp. 84, 87f; An analysis of Anna Dalassene's political action is developed further below.

authority was restricted to religious aspects, such as monastic patronage⁷⁷, or whether her influence also extended to political affairs;⁷⁸ and also whether Alexios I was comfortable with this maternal influence or simply tolerated it against his will. The reason for Anna Dalassene's removal from her position is similarly unclear.⁷⁹ Is it possible that she was involved with heretical movements as Steven Runciman once proposed?⁸⁰

Anna Dalassene's role during the reign of Alexios I Komnenos evidently went beyond monastic patronage. When the emperor left the city in 1081 to fight the Normans, Alexios I composed a golden bull, which officially confirmed Anna Dalassene's position by granting her imperial prerogatives.⁸¹ Moreover, she acted actively in order to protect her son's interests as she saw fit. As seen above, Anna Dalassene conspired in order to facilitate the divorce from Eirene Doukaina and the marriage with Maria of Alania. This would have given the new emperor a stronger source of legitimacy, for Maria of Alania was empress under two emperors, and at the same time, Anna Dalassene would get rid of Ioannes Doukas' family. Furthermore, she was able to put forward Eustratios Garidas as her candidate for the Patriarchate of Constantinople. When Alexios I Komnenos was in need of resources for his wars against the Normans, Anna Dalassene and Isaakios Komnenos proposed the appropriation of ecclesiastical properties based on an old law that justified this measure in order to rescue Christians from captivity.⁸² Anna Dalassene's last political action recorded by Anna Komnene was the blinding of the pretender who claimed to be Leon/Konstantinos Diogenes in 1096, at her order.⁸³ Although Anna Dalassene was subordinate to Alexios I, the *autokrator*, she took actions that were clearly imperial prerogatives, such as choosing a patriarch, confiscating property and punishing a rebel.⁸⁴

⁷⁷ As suggested by Dionysios Mamankakis, Pamela Armstrong, and Élisabeth Malamut, see Armstrong, Alexios Komnenos, Holy Men and Monasteries, pp. 119–231; Mamankakis, Ο αυτοκράτορας, pp. 90–136; Malamut, Alexis Ier Comnène, pp. 133–143.

⁷⁸ As suggested by Barbara Hill, see Hill, Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women, pp. 73–83, 114–117; Hill, Alexios I Komnenos, pp. 49–51.

⁷⁹ Lemerle describes Alexios I as “faible devant les femmes”, see Lemerle, Cinq Études, p. 298.

⁸⁰ As suggests Steven Runciman and Barbara Hill, see Hill, Alexios I Komnenos, pp. 51f; Runciman, The End, pp. 517–524.

⁸¹ Anna Komnene, Alexiad I, 3, vi; Dölger dates this edict in August 1081, Dölger/ Wirth, Regesten, nr. 1073, p. 89f,

⁸² Anna Komnene, Alexiad I, 5, ii, 2; Dölger/ Wirth, Regesten, nr. 1085.

⁸³ Anna Komnene, Alexiad I, 10, iv, 5.

⁸⁴ About the election of Patriarchs of Constantinople, Beck, Kirche und theologische Literatur, pp. 60–62; On the punishment of rebels and the role of the emperor in political repression, Dias, A reação imperial,

Indeed, Anna Dalassene's measures would not have taken place without her son's approval, but she was responsible for these measures and was perceived as such. Otherwise, Zonaras would not have pointed out that "Alexios resented it because he almost only enjoyed the imperial power in name, but he respected his mother and did not want to take the authority from her involuntarily"⁸⁵ and Theophylaktos of Ohrid would not have celebrated the teamwork between mother and son.⁸⁶

Besides helping Alexios I with his government tasks, Anna Dalassene had another and even more important function. She was the guarantor and the bedrock of the Komnenos faction. The crisis involving Ioannes Komnenos, as reported by Anna Komnene, clearly illustrates it. He was the son of the sebastokrator Isaac Komnenos, Alexios' brother, and appointed *doux* of Dyrrachium. Anna Komnene informs us that he was accused by the archbishop of Ohrid of conspiring against the emperor when the latter was organizing a campaign against the Serbs. When informed of the accusation, Alexios acted very carefully. He summoned Ioannes meet him in Philippopolis, but simultaneously he instructed the envoy to arrest him if Ioannes refused to come. Isaakios was informed of the events and rushed to Philippopolis, for he feared that his son would resist. Arriving there, Isaakios was told that his son had already arrived and then he became furious. In the imperial tent, Isaakios accused his brother, Adrianos Komnenos, and his brother-in-law, the kaisar Nikephoros Melissenos, of fabricating these accusations against his son and threatened them with physical violence. Finally, Alexios dismissed all accusations out of respect for his older brother, reestablished Ioannes Komnenos as *doux* of the city and sent Isaakios back to their mother to inform her that all had been settled.⁸⁷

The chronology of this episode is bewildering. Ioannes Komnenos' direct known predecessor in the office was Ioannes Doukas, the empress Eirene Doukaina's brother. The following statement is based on the following report in the *Alexiad*:

pp. 111–137.

⁸⁵ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 746: ἤχθετο μὲν οὖν ὁ βασιλεὺς ὡς ἐν μόνῳ σχεδὸν τῆς βασιλείας ἀπολαύων ὀνόματι, ἤδειτο δὲ τὴν μητέρα καὶ ἀκούσης ἐκείνης ἀφελῆσθαι τὴν ἐξουσίαν οὐκ ἤθελεν.

⁸⁶ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 237–241.

⁸⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 8, vii, 3 – viii, 4. On the crisis resulting from the accusations made against Ioannes Komnenos, see Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 145; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 125, pp. 96f, and 368; Frankopan, *The imperial governors of Dyrrakhion*, pp. 75–79, 94–97; Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 15–17; Leib, *Complots à Byzance*, p. 262; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 309–311; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 213; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 4, 134–138. On Adrianos Komnenos, see Ch. 3 fn. 10.

“This Ioannes [Doukas] was sent by the emperor to Epidamnos with a considerable army, for two purposes: to concern himself diligently with the protection of Dyrrachium and to make war on the Dalmatians. A certain man called Bodin, a combative and completely unprincipled rascal, refused to stay inside his own borders and made daily attacks on the towns near to Dalmatia. These he annexed. For eleven years Ioannes Doukas remained in Dyrrachium. He recovered many of the defended places under the control of Bolkan, and many Dalmatians prisoners were sent to the emperor. In the end, he clashed with Bodin in a fierce battle and took him too.”⁸⁸

We also know from the *Alexiad* that Ioannes Doukas predecessor was Georgios Palaiologos, sent to the city in 1081 to replace Georgios Monomachatos as its governor, where he stayed defending the city until at least 1083.⁸⁹ Given that Anna Komnene tells us that Ioannes Doukas remained in Dyrrachium for eleven years, he could have supposedly been its *doux* until 1094 at the earliest, being replaced by Ioannes Komnenos. This conclusion, however, contradicts another report given by Anna Komnene, for she tells that her father appointed Ioannes Doukas to the office of *meGas doux* in the next spring after his victory over the Petchenegs in Levounion (29 April 1091), which led to an earliest date of 1092 for Ioannes Komnenos’ appointment and consequently for the outbreak of this crisis.⁹⁰

Scholarship noticed this chronological contradiction in Anna Komnene’s text and offered possible explanations. Demetrios Polemis and Basile Skoulatos state that Ioannes Doukas was appointed *doux* of Dyrrachium in 1081 in *honoris causa*.⁹¹ Frankopan considers plausible that Ioannes Doukas’ term as *doux* of Dyrrachium lasted between 1083 and 1094, though he cogitates that Anna Komnene might have committed a mistake in counting the years in which Ioannes Doukas held this office.⁹²

⁸⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 7, viii, 9: καὶ γὰρ τουτονὶ τὸν Δούκαν Ἰωάννην εἰς Ἐπίδαμνον ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ μετὰ στρατιᾶς ἀξιωμαχοῦ ἐξέπεμψεν ἅμα μὲν καὶ περὶ τὴν τοῦ Δυρραχίου φρουρὰν ἐπιμελῶς διαπονεῖσθαι, ἅμα δὲ καὶ τὴν μετὰ τῶν Δαλματῶν ἀναδήσασθαι μάχην. ὁ γὰρ οὕτω καλούμενος Βοδῖνος μαχιμώτατος ὢν καὶ ῥαδιουργίας πλήρης οὐ μέχρι τῶν ἰδίων ὄρων ἐστάναι ἠβούλετο, ἀλλ’ ὀσημέραι τὰς ἔγγιστα Δαλματίας κωμοπόλεις κατατρέχων τοῖς ἰδίους προσετίθει ὀρίοις. ὁ δὲ Δούκας Ἰωάννης ἐνιαυτοὺς πρὸς τῷ ἐνὶ δέκα εἰς τὸ Δυρράχιον ἐνδιατρίψας πολλὰ μὲν τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν ἐξουσίαν Βολκάνου ἀφηρεῖτο φρούρια, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ ζωγρίαν Δαλμάτας πρὸς τὸν αὐτοκράτορα ἐξαπέστειλε καὶ τέλος καρτερὰν μετὰ τοῦ Βοδίνου μάχην συναρράξας καὶ αὐτὸν κατέσχευεν.

⁸⁹ Frankopan, *The Imperial Governors of Dyrrakhion*, pp. 75–79; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 101–103.

⁹⁰ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry 125, p. 96f; Gautier, *Défection*, p. 219, 227. On the title *meGas doux*, Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la mer*, pp. 205–211; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, pp. 146–148.

⁹¹ Gautier, *Défection*, 218, n. 11; Polemis, *The Doukas*, 66, n. 5; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 146, n. 10.

⁹² Frankopan, *Imperial Governors of Dyrrakhion*, p. 89f.

Nonetheless, an interesting yet openly overlooked detail is that Anna Komnene does not state that Ioannes Doukas spent eleven years in Dyrrachium as the governor (*doux* or *strategos*) of that city. She only says that he was sent there with enough troops to support the defense of Dyrrachium, where he remained for eleven years after having successfully faced the Serbs, having even captured one of their leaders in battle.⁹³ One thing that Anna Komnene does not mention is the office held by Doukas. Therefore, I suggest he was sent there together with his brother-in-law, Georgios Palaiologos, as part of his military and political education, and was appointed as his successor at some point between 1081 and 1092.⁹⁴

In my opinion, this is a convincing hypothesis given the sparse sources we have about the upbringing of young Byzantine aristocrats. Part of their education was accompanying their older relatives with higher offices during military campaigns or during their terms as imperial representatives in the provinces. Nikephoros Bryennios reports that the emperor Basileios II took care of the military education of the future emperor, Isaac I Komnenos, and his brother, Manuel Komnenos, Alexios' father.⁹⁵ Later Bryennios also reports that the young future emperor Alexios Komnenos and Konstantinos Diogenes followed Isaakios Komnenos, Alexios' older brother, when the latter was appointed as *doux* of Antioch. Konstantinos died while fighting the Turks under his orders.⁹⁶ As an emperor, Alexios followed the aristocratic tradition of keeping a retinue of young nobles during his military campaigns because he felt responsible for their upbringing.

Considering what was presented above, we can pinpoint 1092 as the most probable year for Ioannes Doukas' promotion to the office of *megas doux* and Ioannes Komnenos' appointment as *doux* of Dyrrachium. The accusations against the Komnenos, therefore, were made in 1092 or shortly afterwards.

Anna Komnene, our only source on the event, does not report the reason or the kind of conspiracy the incumbent *doux* of Dyrrachium was accused of being involved

⁹³ Dalmatian sources such as the Priest of Diocleia cannot help us here, for they are silent concerning Ioannes Komnenos' activities in Dyrrachion, see Ferluga, *Dyrrhachion*, p. 59f

⁹⁴ If Polemis and Skoulatos are correct, Ioannes Doukas was born in 1064, therefore he was seventeen in 1081. Given that a large-scale Norman invasion was to be expected in the months following Alexios' coronation, it would have been careless to appoint an inexperienced teenager as *doux* of Dyrrachium, who would consequently be the main responsible for the Byzantine defense. Georgios Palaiologos was the wisest choice. Frankopan, *The Imperial Governors of Dyrrakhion*, pp. 65–103; Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 66–77; Skoulatos, *Personnages*, pp. 145–150.

⁹⁵ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 1, pp. 74–76.

⁹⁶ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, II, 3–14, pp. 144–167 (for Alexios Komnenos under his brother's orders); II, 29, p. 207 (for Konstantinos Diogenes).

with. Bernard Leib presented Ioannes Komnenos as a foolish young man who let himself be instrumentalized by others.⁹⁷ Peter Frankopan hypothesizes that Ioannes Komnenos decided to conspire after the emperor's first son, also named Ioannes Komnenos, was born in 1087, for it meant the end of any ambition that the *doux* of Dyrrachium could have had of succeeding Alexios I some day.⁹⁸ This hypothesis is, nevertheless, highly unlikely. Anna Komnene mentions that the emperor saw him as a son at the beginning of his reign, for Alexios I did not have any male children of his own yet. However, this statement was made when Anna Komnene reproduced a letter sent by Alexios to the German Emperor Henry IV (1053–1106) in which the Byzantine emperor proposed a marriage alliance in exchange for support against Robert Guiscard.⁹⁹ Hence, it is natural that Alexios I elevated the boy's status in order to present him to the German emperor as a more suitable bridegroom. Hence, he was never intended to be Alexios' successor. If the marriage between Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina had remained without male issue, the obvious successor would have been Konstantinos Doukas, who was crowned together with Alexios and betrothed to Anna Komnene, his first daughter.

An adequate explanation for the origin of this crisis can be found in the letters of Theophylaktos Hephaistos, the archbishop of Ohrid. Considering the dating of this event, in the early 1090s, the anonymous archbishop of Ohrid to whom Anna Komnene attributes the accusation against Ioannes Komnenos, could be none other than Theophylaktos of Ohrid, for he was appointed archbishop sometime between 1088 and 1092.¹⁰⁰

Among several important political personages of his time, Theophylaktos corresponded also with Ioannes Komnenos when the latter held the office of *doux* of Dyrrachium. As we mentioned in the chapter dedicated to the characteristics of the sources, Theophylaktos' letters are difficult to work with. It is hard to order them chronologically, the letters rarely mention the missive to which they were answering and Theophylaktos frequently expresses himself through allusions and metaphors, which probably would be understood by the receiver or else should be explained by the

⁹⁷ Leib, *Complots à Byzance*, p. 262.

⁹⁸ Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 15–17.

⁹⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 3, x, 6. See also Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1077.

¹⁰⁰ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 29–34; Frankopan, *The Imperial Governors of Dyrrakhion*, p. 92; Frankopan, *Kinship*, p. 16; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ohrid*, p. 8. On the situation of the Archbishopric of Ohrid during the Byzantine rule, see Iliev, *The First Two Centuries*, pp. 237–252. Prinzing, *The Autocephalous*, pp. 355–383.

letter-bearer, but remain enigmatic to us. Considering that, the letters of Theophylaktos of Ohrid to Ioannes Komnenos deal with two themes: illegal taxation of Bulgarian Church property and gossips.¹⁰¹ In one of the letters (no. 12), Theophylaktos accuses the *doux* of ignoring direct orders from the emperor by continuing to tax ecclesiastical property and forcing *corvée* upon the clergy.¹⁰²

Contrary to those who read retaliation by Ioannes Komnenos in consequence of Theophylaktos' accusations against him in this letter, Gautier dates it to the eve of the crisis involving Ioannes Komnenos.¹⁰³ Although there is no particular element in the letter that would allow us to establish an exact dating, its tone points out a disagreement between both parties, which gives a background to the extreme action taken by Theophylaktos of accusing Ioannes Komnenos of conspiring against the emperor. Ignoring an imperial decree and acting directly against its orders was a rebellion of sorts. Therefore, it is reasonable to conjecture that the whole Ioannes Komnenos conundrum was the result of an escalation of the complaints by a churchman very well connected with important personages in Constantinople, an unskilled treatment of a fiscal quarrel by Ioannes Komnenos, gossip and the natural distrust of the emperor towards his provincial governors.¹⁰⁴ The facts that Ioannes Komnenos continued to hold his post without rebelling and that he did not offer resistance when called by Alexios I are also evidence that he was not plotting something more serious against the emperor.

The most important aspect of the episode is not the conspiracy itself or the suspicion of one, but the exposure of the internal mechanics of the Komnenos family. It is the first registered quarrel among the Komnenoi. It could have resulted in a rupture between the brothers Alexios, Isaakios and Adrianos, but Alexios decided to dismiss the accusations and not to give credit to Adrianos' insinuations. The reason for this easy and quick de-escalation of tension is Anna Dalassene, to whom Alexios I sent Isaakios in order to inform her that all had been settled.

¹⁰¹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 12 pp. 166–169; nr. 19, 194–195.

¹⁰² Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 12, p. 167f: Εἰ δ' ἡμεῖς αὐθέντην καὶ εὐεργέτην ἐπιγραφόμεθα – μηδὲ γὰρ οὕτω μανειήμεν ὡς ἄχαρί τι καὶ τι καὶ σκαιὸν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ χρηστότητι ἀντενδείξασθαι –, ορᾷς πῶς οὕτως ῥαδίως ἀνατέτραπται τὸ σιγίλλιον τοῦ πανσεβάστου Κομνηνοῦ παρ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ Κομνηνοῦ (If we give (you) the title of the lord and patron – for we would not be mad to react to your grace in an unpleasant and unlucky manner – you see how easily the official order of the *pansebastos* Komnenos has been made null and void by the Komnenos).

¹⁰³ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, pp. 51f.

¹⁰⁴ On the suspicion by the central power towards provincial officials, powerful figures or the provincial population in general, see Neville, *Authority*, pp. 46f. The importance of letters and other written media in the Byzantine political process, see Holmes, *Political Literacy*, pp. 137–149.

Here, in this particular case, Anna Dalassene's most important function is obvious, as well as the reason why Alexios allowed her to have the role that she had during the first half of his reign. Anna Dalassene warranted the union and cooperation between brothers. She made sure that everyone played their part despite the fact that Isaakios was the older brother, who also could have become emperor instead of Alexios, and that Adrianos was a conspiratorial and untrustworthy member of the family.¹⁰⁵ Consequently, Alexios was not weak with women as Paul Lemerle puts it, but – as in other aspects of his reign – an able political agent in a weak position who knew when he should step back and compromise in order to achieve greater goals. In the present case, the exceptional role given to Anna Dalassene was tolerated in order to secure his brothers' collaboration and to keep the Komnenos family together. Nevertheless, Alexios I removed his mother promptly when the political conditions changed and the benefit of keeping his mother in such a position was outbalanced by problems brought by it.

3.4.3 The Rise and Fall of Maria of Alania

Konstantinos Doukas was a child at the time of Alexios I's seizure of power. He was no more than seven years old.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the protector of his interests was, at least in the early beginning, his mother Maria of Alania. It is hard to delineate the group of the supporters surrounding Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas. Nevertheless, she seemed to be very close to scholars such as Theophylaktos Hephaistos, who was to become the archbishop of Ohrid, and Eustratios of Nikaia.¹⁰⁷ It is openly assumed that Ioannes Italos supported Maria of Alania, but there is no direct evidence for this connection.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ In a speech to Alexios I Komnenos held likely in 1088, Theophylaktos of Ohrid calls Anna Dalassene “the one who gives union to you [the Komnenos brothers], who are branches and divided in many faces, but united in the root and [those who] drawn the juice from her”. Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 237f: ἐκείνη καὶ τὴν ἔνωσιν ὑμῖν δίδωσι, κλάδοις μὲν οὖσι καὶ σχιζομένοις εἰς διάφορα πρόσωπα, τῇ ρίζῃ δὲ ἐνουμένοις καὶ ἀπ’ ἐκείνης ἔλκουσι τὴν πιότητα.

¹⁰⁶ On biographical information on Konstantinos Doukas, see Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 60–63; Skoulatos, *Les personages*, pp. 57–60.

¹⁰⁷ Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, p. 185; Mullett, *The ‘Disgrace’* pp. 202f.

¹⁰⁸ Ioannes Italos was elevated by Michael VII, but it does not necessarily mean that the bond extended to Maria of Alania and her son. Accordingly, the assumption made by Perikles Joannou that the trial of Italos was a move against Konstantinos Doukas' supporters is based on weak evidence, see Joannou, *Christliche Metaphysik in Byzanz I*, pp. 9–31. Robert Browning also claims the existence of this connection between Maria of Alania and Italos, but Margaret Mullett denies it. She asks, “why would Alexios continue to favour Maria and Constantine well beyond the period of the first Norman war but interrupt that war to condemn their puppet Italos simply because he was their puppet?”. Her skepticism is correct, see Browning, *Enlightenment*, p. 13f; Mullett, *Mullett, The ‘Disgrace’*, p. 203, fn. 8.

Theophylaktos Hephaistos held a speech to the *porphyrogenetos* Konstantinos Doukas most likely in the Manganas Palace shortly before the birth of Ioannes Komnenos in 1087.¹⁰⁹ It is possible to find evidence of criticism to the emperor in it.¹¹⁰ Since Konstantinos was still a young boy, Theophylaktos was not able to eulogize his deeds, thus he devoted himself to offering council to the *porphyrogenetos*. In order to reinforce the actions of a good emperor, Theophylaktos presents an image of a tyrant as an anti-example.¹¹¹

For Theophylaktos, a tyrant is someone who takes power not through the hands of the people, but by violence. This action leads to moral and political deterioration to a point that the tyrant himself has to live in fear of those who he pays to oppress his fellow citizens. Theophylaktos, hence, highlights the importance of the legal ascension to power through the hand of the people.¹¹² Konstantinos is also advised to lead armies, but not to expose himself as a common soldier.¹¹³ Finally, Theophylaktos claims that there was nothing worse for the Roman Empire than the lack of a strong elder to manage public affairs, for the body wrinkles with time, but the inner fruit keeps itself compact as a nut.¹¹⁴ The criticism of Alexios is evident in Theophylaktos' words. Alexios took the throne violently and illegally, was twenty-four at the occasion of his takeover and was almost captured on many occasions after defeats as in Dyrrachium in 1081¹¹⁵ and in Dristra in 1087.¹¹⁶

It is important to ask about the reasons for this apparent criticism by Theophylaktos of Alexios. In the period between his seizure of power in 1081 and neutralizing of the Norman threat in 1085, Alexios I's situation was fragile. In his speech to Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas, Theophylaktos of Ohrid does not attack the Emperor Alexios I directly, for his patron still had an official alliance with him. Nonetheless, by attacking characteristics and actions that could easily be connected with Alexios I, Theophylaktos was clearly flirting with his internal opposition and presenting his patron and pupil as the potential option to the hated emperor. Had

¹⁰⁹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 178–211. The location is assumed. It was not in Alexios' presence, otherwise he would have been mentioned and the content of the speech would have been clearly different.

¹¹⁰ Mullett, *How to criticize*, pp. 254f.

¹¹¹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 195, 21–199, 22.

¹¹² Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 199, 22–201, 23.

¹¹³ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 206, 14–18.

¹¹⁴ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 207, 23–26.

¹¹⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 4, vii.

¹¹⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 7, iii, 9–10.

Alexios' rule became politically compromised, Theophylaktos had an adequate successor in Konstantinos Doukas. In this, he acted in similar form as Michael Psellos acted with Konstantinos X Doukas when Isaakios I Komnenos' government became unsustainable. Actually, both situations were very similar. Moreover, Konstantinos Doukas, the son of Michael VII, was a much stronger candidate than his grandfather Konstantinos X had been, for he was a *porphyrogenetos* and already crowned.

The birth of Ioannes Komnenos in 1087 changed the destiny of Konstantinos Doukas and his mother, but not abruptly. Ioannes Komnenos was not crowned immediately after his birth unlike Anna Komnene, who was betrothed to Konstantinos Doukas after her birth. One possible reason for this delay was that the crowning of Ioannes Komnenos would clearly have meant breaking the settlement with Maria of Alania. The exact moment when Konstantinos Doukas forfeited his co-emperorship is hard to pin down. Anna Komnene laments that she suffered a disaster as she was not still eight years old, that is 1090.¹¹⁷ Neapolitan registers reveal that Ioannes Komnenos was already crowned co-emperor in November 1092.¹¹⁸

If Anna Komnene was referring to the removal of Konstantinos Doukas, as described by Zonaras, and the consequent end of her imperial ambitions, it is possible that the removal of Konstantinos Doukas – maybe using health problems as an excuse¹¹⁹ – and the elevation of Ioannes was a gradual process. Meanwhile, according to Zonaras, Maria of Alania was more or less constrained to adopt monastic attire.¹²⁰ The betrothal between Konstantinos Doukas and Anna Komnene was maintained and the emperor's first child was sent to live with her future mother-in-law.¹²¹ When Konstantinos was old

¹¹⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, vii, 4: τὰ δ' ἔξωθεν καὶ ὅσα μοι συνεπεπτόκει οὐπω τὸν ὄγδοον ὑπερῆλασάση χρόνον. Leonora Neville denies that the lamentations described by Anna Komnene had anything to do with the removal of Konstantinos Doukas. She holds Anna's frequent woes as rhetorical tools with which Anna tries to soothe the reader's possible negative reaction to the idea of a female historian. As mentioned above, Neville is likely correct in her reading of Anna Komnene's argumentative methods, but it is hard to believe that her lamentations had no connection with her biography. Otherwise, they would not have any effect on her readers, who were evidently better informed about her life than we are, see Ch. i.iii.iv.

¹¹⁸ *Regii Neapolitani Archivi Monumenta Edita ac Illustrata*. Napoli 1857, pp. 146: “An. 1092✠ In nomine domini dei salvatoris Ihsu Christi Imperante domino nostro alexio magno Imperatore anno duodecimo. sed et iohannes porfilogenito magno Imperatore eius filio anno primo. Die quinta decima mensis nobembrii indictione prima neapoli.”, p. 148: “An. 1092✠ In nomine domini dei salvatoris Ihsu Christi Imperante domino nostro alexio magno Imperatore anno duodecimo. sed et iohannes porfilogenito magno Imperatore eius filio anno primo. Die none mensis decembrii indictione prima neapoli.”. See also Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, reg. 1092; Chalandon, *Essai*, p. 139, fn. 1; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 32, p. 178, n. 13.

¹¹⁹ Polemis, *The Doukas*, pp. 60–63.

¹²⁰ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 733.

¹²¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, i, 4.

enough, he established his own residence near to Serres.¹²² It is not clear whether this location was a family property or granted by Alexios I. In spite of all the care shown and the compensations made by the emperor, the move was a serious blow to the destiny of both Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas, as well as a clear violation of the settlement reached at the beginning of Alexios I's reign.

Aware of the resentment that this action could have caused, Alexios I estranged Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas from their supporters. Theophylaktos Hephaistos was elected archbishop of Ohrid between 1088 and 1091. His appointment to this post coincided exactly with Konstantinos Doukas' removal and Maria of Alania's adoption of the monastic garb. It is difficult to separate one fact from the other. Although complaints by Constantinopolitans that appointments to posts in the provinces were in fact an exile are often considered as a literary *topos* by the scholarship, Mullett believes that Theophylaktos Hephaistos saw his ecclesiastical post in Ohrid in this way, for "to be 'exiled' from Constantinople at this date meant not only the exile from the heart of the empire, from the *theatra* and literary society, but also from participation in major changes in the government of the church".¹²³ Moreover, in a second panegyric to the imperial circle, dated in 1088, Theophylaktos urged the emperor to crown his first son. This seems to have been a desperate move by Theophylaktos of Ohrid, already informed of his future appointment, to make amends with the emperor, whom he had blatantly criticized some years ago in a very different political context.¹²⁴

This change in Maria of Alania's fortune, the breakdown of the agreement by Alexios I, the separation from her supporters and Konstantinos Doukas' loss of imperial rank forced them into the opposition and contributed to the formation of the most dangerous internal threat for the emperor: the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094.

3.4.4 The Leon of Chalcedon Controversy: 1081–1095

Needing resources to finance his Norman wars, Alexios I asked Isaakios Komnenos and Anna Dalassene, who he had appointed to maintain stability in Constantinople, to solve this problem. The solution they found – the confiscation of

¹²² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, v, 4.

¹²³ Mullett, *Theophylaktos of Ohrid*, p. 259.

¹²⁴ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, p. 235, 7–14. Frankopan perceives also traces of criticism in the second *logos* of Theophylaktos of Ohrid to Alexios I, see Frankopan, Peter, *Where Advice Meets Criticism*, pp. 71–88.

ecclesiastical property – resulted in a long and complex dispute with a group of clergymen led by Leon, the bishop of Chalcedon, which lasted until the end of 1094 or the beginning of 1095.¹²⁵ As in other internal conflicts during Alexios' reign, the Leon of Chalcedon controversy had many layers and various causes, such as ecclesiastical and theological, which naturally cannot be clearly separated from one another. However, the focus here is on the influence this crisis had on politics. Other aspects will be addressed as far as they relate to the political background of this controversy.

The whole polemic concerning Leon of Chalcedon was long and draining for Alexios. It is impressive that one metropolitan could offer such resistance to an emperor even if he was contested and in a fragile position as Alexios was in the first years of his reign. With the support of other clergymen, such as Metaxas, Leon of Chalcedon denied the emperor the right to confiscate church property. He not only accused the emperor of Messalianism and demanded the deposition of the Patriarch Eustratios Garidas. He also called for the reestablishment of Kosmas, the patriarch removed soon after Alexios' crowning.¹²⁶ In order to placate the rebellious metropolitan, Eustratios Garidas was forced to abdicate in 1084 and the emperor appointed Nicholas Grammatikos to the Patriarchal See in 1084.¹²⁷ Leon of Chalcedon was, nevertheless, not satisfied with this measure and insisted that the name of Eustratios Garidas should be banned from church prayers and diptychs, a demand that the new patriarch did not acknowledge. Leon of Chalcedon was persistent, to the extent of putting himself in a schismatic position by not agreeing to participate in ceremonies with the patriarchal clergy and by accusing his opponents of iconoclasm. This situation resulted in his exile to Sozopolis in 1086.¹²⁸

Leon of Chalcedon controversy was more than an ecclesiastical crisis, for it had a clear political angle. Anna Komnene points out that some members of the bureaucracy supported and encouraged the persistence of the bishop of Chalcedon.¹²⁹ Moreover, Leon of Chalcedon can be directly connected with Georgios Palaiologos, Eirene

¹²⁵ On Leon of Chalcedon controversy, see Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 136–137; Angold, *Church*, pp. 46–48; Beck, *Geschichte der orthodoxen Kirche*, pp. 167, 169f; Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, pp. 213–284; Gerhold, *Le “mouvement chalcédonien”*, pp. 87–104; Grumel, *Les documents athonites*, pp. 116–135; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 194–198; Morris, *Monks and Laymen*, pp. 270f; Tiftixoglu, *Gruppenbildungen*, pp. 42–54; Trizio, *Trial*, pp. 465–467. See also Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1085, 1128, 1129, 1130; Grumel/Darrouzès, *Regestes*, nr. 932, 937, 939, 940, 943, 952, and 965.

¹²⁶ Grumel, *Les documents athonites*, pp. 124–126; Dölger/Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1129.

¹²⁷ Grumel/Darrouzès, *Regestes*, entries nr. 937.

¹²⁸ Gerhold, *Le “mouvement chalcédonien”*, pp. 89–91.

¹²⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 5, ii, 6: ὅποιοι πολλοὶ τότε ὑπῆρχον τοῦ πολιτεύματος.

Doukaina's brother-in-law¹³⁰, Maria of Bulgaria, Eirene Doukaina's mother, and indirectly with the Empress Eirene Doukaina herself.¹³¹ Victoria Casamiquela Gerhold points out the connection between the resistance of Leon of Chalcedon and the Doukai. According to her, the "Chalcedonian movement" was an association between the Doukai, who struggled to maintain their political position, the bureaucracy, which resisted displacement and their loss of influence under Alexios I, and part of the clergy, which defended the legacy of Michael Keroularios with regard to church privileges and independence vis-à-vis the emperor.¹³²

Gerhold is correct in relating the Chalcedonian crisis to members of the Doukas family and their discontent with Alexios I's regime. However, the reasons for dissatisfaction, as well as the likely objectives of supporting Leon of Chalcedon, which Gerhold presents, are not entirely convincing. Gerhold states that the Doukai were not acting against their own interests in opposing Alexios I. She then names episodes, which displayed conflicts of interest between the Komnenoi and Doukai, such as the efforts undertaken by Eirene Doukaina to convince Alexios I to remove Ioannes Komnenos from the line of succession and her leanings towards Anna Komnene and Nikephoros Bryennios.¹³³ Elsewhere, Gerhold states that the causes of the tensions between Komnenoi and Doukai lay in Alexios I's mistrust of his relatives by marriage and Eirene Doukaina's ambitions.¹³⁴ This explanation is not entirely satisfactory, for Gerhold presents as evidence of Eirene's ambitions actions against her son and in favor of her daughter, which, however, only took place at the end of Alexios' reign. This is too late to explain the tensions of the first years of his reign. Secondly, Gerhold understands the Byzantine aristocratic family as a clan with unified interests despite occasional internal conflicts. Accordingly, although she recognizes the rupture in the Doukas family between the group around Maria of Alania and the group around the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas, Gerhold states that they were able to present a unified front at the end of the day. Thus, the agreement brokered by Ioannes Doukas to convince Maria

¹³⁰ Anna Komnene reports that during the defeat in Dristra in 1087, Leon Chalcedon had supposedly appeared to Georgios Palaiologos and provided him with a horse although the metropolitan was exiled in Sozopolis by that time. The scene has strong hagiographic undertones. Anna Komnene uses the episode to report the strong connections of her uncle with Leon of Chalcedon, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 7, iv, 1.

¹³¹ By request of Maria of Bulgaria, Theophylaktos of Ohrid asks the deacon Niketas, a nephew of the bishop of Chalcedon, to intervene by the empress for the *protostrator* Michael Doukas, for he had disrespected an unnamed canon, Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 84, pp. 440–443.

¹³² Gerhold, *Le "mouvement chalcédonien"*, p. 99.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 94f.

¹³⁴ Gerhold, *Empereur, Église et aristocratie laïque*, p. 59.

of Alania to leave the Palace would have been a sacrifice in name of family unity and the crowning of Konstantinos Doukas a sign of family union.¹³⁵

The situation appears to be very different. Both fractions in the Doukas family represented different, conflicting interests. As long as Eirene Doukaina had no offspring with Alexios, Maria of Alania was a threat to Eirene. Therefore, the agreement between Ioannes Doukas and Maria of Alania was not an understanding among relatives. It was rather a compromise between adversaries. In the following years, Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas distanced themselves from the emperor, while Eirene Doukaina and her family became gradually closer through the birth of the imperial couple's offspring. Furthermore, Alexios Komnenos seemingly trusted his relatives by marriage considering the role they played in his seizure of power and afterwards as military commanders and provincial governors. Thus, the source of suspicion and tension with the Doukai must be sought elsewhere, not in the emperor, but in his mother, Anna Dalassene. As stated above, she cherished a long grudge against Ioannes Doukas and his family. There is convincing evidence indicating that she actively worked in the first days of her son's reign to remove Eirene Doukaina and her family so that she would not have to work with people she hated so much. Thus, she appears to have encouraged her son's divorce, trying to convince the Patriarch Kosmas to collaborate. Nonetheless, she was out-manuevered by Ioannes Doukas, who persuaded the patriarch not to resign before crowning Eirene Doukaina.

The hypothetical marriage between Alexios Komnenos and Maria of Alania would have been complicated canonically, as well as scandalous. Maria of Alania's marriage with Nikephoros III had already caused enough outrage because her husband Michael VII was still alive. Thus, a third marriage with Alexios would be even more insulting, not only because two of her former husbands were still alive but also because Maria of Alania had adopted Alexios Komnenos as her son.¹³⁶ This adoption was politically motivated. Alexios thereby gained unlimited access to the women's quarter in the Palace in order to conspire with Isaakios Komnenos and Maria of Alania without attracting greater attention. Yet the Byzantines considered spiritual kinship as important as blood kinship, or indeed even more important, and a marriage between Alexios Komnenos and Maria of Alania would definitely have caused indignation among the

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 61.

¹³⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, i, 5.

clergy and among the society in general.¹³⁷ Consequently, we can see how far Anna Dalassene was ready to go in order to expel Ioannes Doukas and his family from court.

The “Chalcedonian Movement” can be observed from a different perspective by emphasizing that, first of all, Eustratios Garidas was chosen for the Patriarchal Seat not by Alexios I, but by Anna Dalassene, whose inner circle he frequented and whose favor he acquired by prophesying imperial futures for Anna Dalassene’s sons.¹³⁸ Secondly, according to Anna Komnene, it was Anna Dalassene and Isaakios Komnenos who proposed the idea of confiscating church property. Alexios I was absent fighting the Normans and delegated the task of finding resources to his mother and his brother.¹³⁹ Thirdly, by controlling the women’s quarter in the Palace and being the feminine leading figure at court, Anna Dalassene was clearly occupying the place that should have belonged to Eirene Doukaina. It is hard not to see how her family and supporters would not be dissatisfied with it. Consequently, when Leon of Chalcedon demanded the deposition of Eustratios Garidas and the reestablishment of Kosmas, he was acting according to the interests of Ioannes Doukas and his family and against the interests of Anna Dalassene. It must have been embarrassing for the emperor’s mother to have someone with whom she had a long association accused of heresy.

At this point, we should consider the accusation of heresy against her made by Matthew of Edessa. According to him, Anna Dalassene became a follower of a monk who worshipped Satan as a god. Because of him, she put pieces of the True Cross in the emperor’s shoes so that he would step on it while walking. When the emperor found it out, he burned the heresiarch, drowned his followers and banned his mother from the court.¹⁴⁰

This accusation is taken with a grain of salt by Steven Runciman due to the uncertainties concerning the date, the identification of the heresy, and the trustworthiness of the source.¹⁴¹ Yet Zdenko Zlatar has recently suggested that the accusations put forward by Matthew of Edessa were truthful, connecting Anna

¹³⁷ On adoptions in Byzantium, see Macrides, Ruth J./ Cutler, Anthony, Art. “Adoption”, in: Kazhdan, ODB, 1, p. 22; Shepard, Father’ or ‘Scorpion’?, pp. 108–130.

¹³⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ii, 7.

¹³⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, ii, 2; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1085; Grumel/ Darrouzès, *Regestes*, entries nr. 921. Varzos interprets this episode as a challenge to the sebastokrator Isaakios. Although he participated closely in the trials, Anna Dalassene had more connections with the involved actors, Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 71–77.

¹⁴⁰ Matthew of Edessa, *Patmowt’iwn*, tr. Doustorian, II, 91, pp. 155f.

¹⁴¹ Runciman, *The End*, p. 520–522.

Dalassene to the Bogomil heresy.¹⁴² Zlatar is correct in identifying the heresy mentioned by the Armenian historian with the Bogomils, as well as with the imperial reaction to it. This group indeed identified Satanael as the second son of God and denied the cult of relics for its materiality. Moreover, its leader, Basileios, was also burned in a public event. However, the connection between the Bogomils and the emperor's mother is made difficult for two reasons. Firstly, due to the date given by Matthew for the event, between 1088 and 1089, as it probably happened later.¹⁴³ Secondly, Matthew of Edessa is neither particularly well-informed about internal Byzantine matters, nor is he very interested in them. The few times that he mentions events in Constantinople, he either exaggerates or mixes up different episodes that happened in different moments in one single report.¹⁴⁴

Instead of considering Matthew of Edessa's accusations against Anna Dalassene as a historical fact, it makes more sense to interpret it as a distant echo of court politics during Alexios' reign. Leon of Chalcedon's accusations of heresy against the patriarch Eustratios may have tainted Dalassene by association. The gossips later reached Matthew, but, in the meanwhile, they had grown, and the indirect association with iconoclastic heresy – for that was the accusation of Leon against Eustratios – had turned into an open accusation against Dalassene. For reasons unknown, Matthew of Edessa decided to connect the gossip with the Bogomil trial, probably because it was the most high-profile heresy trial during Alexios' reign.

In brief, the whole crisis caused by the resistance of Leon of Chalcedon could be described not as a proxy war between Alexios and the Doukai, but between Anna Dalassene and Ioannes Doukas' family. Alexios I's role in this controversy is not defensive. He was more of an arbiter, who had to achieve a balance between two opposing forces that composed the kernel of the group of his supporters: the Doukai, who played a key role in his coup and gave him dynastic legitimacy, and his mother Anna Dalassene, who warranted the support and collaboration of Alexios I's brothers. The emperor had to be careful lest he loses these two very important sources of support. Consequently, Alexios I endured Leon of Chalcedon's arrogance and his attacks on the

¹⁴² Zlatar, *Red and Black Byzantium*, pp. 354–360.

¹⁴³ On the trial of the Bogomils and its dating see Ch. 6 fn. 129.

¹⁴⁴ He states that Nikephoros III reigned for a year (Matthew of Edessa, *Patmowt'iwn*, tr. Doustorian, II, 64, p. 141) and that Nikephoros Melissenos was able to depose Nikephoros III and reign for four months. Then the people of Constantinople deposed Melissenos and put Alexios I in his place (II, 69, p. 142). For an assessment of Matthew of Edessa as a source, see Karayannopoulos/ Weiss, *Quellenkunde*, II, pp. 439f.

Patriarch Eustratios Garidas, which indirectly tainted his own mother. During the whole crisis, Alexios I tried to find a conciliatory ground between the two sides by forcing Eustratios to abdicate and appointing a “neutral” patriarch, Nicholas Grammatikos, instead of reinstating Kosmas, which would be a humiliation.¹⁴⁵ When Leon of Chalcedon insisted on his opposition, Alexios I found no other option than to send him into exile.

3.5 Summary of the Period between 1081 and 1091: the Capacity and Limitations of the Komnenian Patrimonial Regime

The opposition to Alexios I Komnenos before 1091 was characterized by moments of escalation and de-escalation of tensions. The first period of intensification took place between 1081 and 1085. Its causes were his seizure of power, the rupture with the generosity fostered by his predecessors, whose aim was to grant the emperor political support, the concessions to those who had supported Alexios I’s coup or to his opponents, the appropriation of church property to finance the wars against Normans, and finally the constant military defeats.

Alexios I’s first measures produced an opposition formed by the beneficiaries of the previous *status quo*, that is, the aristocratic houses of Constantinople linked with the bureaucracy and with the clergy of Hagia Sophia and holders of lesser court titles. However, this opposition cannot be understood as the result of an essential division within the Byzantine aristocracy. This group did not offer resistance to Alexios I because he was military. Nor did Alexios cancel the *rogai* and used violence when he entered Constantinople because he disliked the *politikoi* or any meritocratic policy linked with this part of the aristocracy. These actions were rather an extreme answer to a problem that none of his predecessors was able to solve.

After the Macedonian dynasty, nobody else was able to claim dynastic legitimacy; hence, the emperors turned to the city and its electoral elements seeking support. Yet this backing was expensive and eventually bankrupted the state. If any emperor tried to limit his generosity toward these urban elements, as Isaakios I Komnenos had, the automatic response was the loss of support and deposition.

Alexios I must have concluded that the only way to avoid the crumbling of the Byzantine state was to destroy this vicious circle. This is what Alexios I did through his violent accession to power in which the city was plundered by his troops and cancelling

¹⁴⁵ On Nicholas Grammatikos, see Angold, Michael, *Church and Society*, pp. 49f.

the generous distributions of stipends to a large group of people, as it had become a tradition in previous reigns. Nevertheless, this option brought with it a shadow of illegality and illegitimacy that accompanied Alexios I to the end of his reign and even afterwards. In the eyes of many, especially of the Constantinopolitan elite whose previous position and influence diminished, he never ceased to be a usurper.¹⁴⁶

As a result, it is possible to understand the unnamed senators, officials, and bureaucrats portrayed by Anna Komnene as gossiping in the corners and at the court of Constantinople and clustering around anyone at odds with the emperor. They were intransigent churchmen like Leon of Chalcedon, army officials of the same social background as the Komnenoi such as Nikephoros Diogenes, the Anemades and Aaron, and foreign enemies like Robert Guiscard. The neutralization of the Norman threat coincided with a period of relative calm in the political situation in Constantinople. The staunch resistance of Leon of Chalcedon remained. However, it never presented an internal menace for Alexios I in itself, for, in its political aspect, it was a dispute between two competing groups within his ruling elite. The second period of internal instability also seemed to be related to a military event, but this time a victory: in Levounion against the Petchenegs in April 1091. This will be the subject of the following chapter.

It is also necessary to summarize what the analysis of the internal conflicts in the ruling elite taught us. Though important, the two pillars of the Komnenian regime – land and tax grants and family connections – had strong limitations. The concessions had two aims: rewarding supporters and placating opponents as well as removing them from the capital. The concessions did not necessarily result in support nor were they even assurances that the benefited would not turn against Alexios I, as it will be demonstrated with the cases of Nikephoros Diogenes and Theodoros Gabras. Nikephoros Melissenos seemed to be satisfied with his position although he plotted together with Adrianos Komnenos against the *sebastokrator* Isaakios' son.

¹⁴⁶ The case of Ioannes I Tzimiskes was similar. He took power through the murder of Nikephoros II Phokas in 969. Although, as Alexios I did, Ioannes I was able to achieve official legitimacy (coronation by the Patriarch Polyeuktos) after expelling the empress Theophano from the palace, the emperor faced a strong opposition by Nikephoros II's relatives, the Phokades, whose thirst for revenge and contestation of Ioannes I's legitimacy were enough to muster supporters in their influence area, Eastern Anatolia, for the next fifty years, see Morris, *Succession and Usurpation*, pp. 199–214.

Family relations were equally limited as a source of support. The Byzantine family organization is often described as clan structure.¹⁴⁷ However, this term is very problematic, since it assumes a group of people related to each other by sometimes very distant connections. According to this literature, these often-distant bonds create an obligation of support or at least non-aggression. Such phenomena were not seen in Byzantium or at least in the times of Alexios I.

The Byzantine aristocratic family was centered on the household, whose organization was limited by direct family connections, while the connection with cousins, uncles, and aunts was weaker. Relations that are more distant hardly counted, unless the relation was also one of service, a smaller household subordinated to a more powerful one, as for example the Dokeianoï and Boutomitai to the Komnenoi. Sometimes, these dependence relationships were reinforced through marriages. Another limitation is temporal. Due to heritage laws, households were dissolved on the death of the *oikodespotes* or the *oikodespoina*. Although Cheynet correctly states that this frailty was compensated by a transmission of social connections, it was natural that the sons should establish households of their own where they would be their own *oikodespotes* independent of their siblings.¹⁴⁸

A clear example of the limits of the Byzantine aristocratic household is the commemoration list in the *typikon* of the Kecharitomene monastery founded by Eirene Doukaina in 1110. The empress lists herself, her husband, her sons, her daughters, her daughters-in-law, her sons-in-law, her mother-in-law, her brothers, her sister, her parents and her uncle. It is remarkable that Alexios I's brothers, father, brothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law who were not Doukai were left out, as well as Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas.¹⁴⁹ Peter Frankopan understands this list as an “endorsement of the Doukas family” and that the list “indicates (and reveals) that power was centered squarely on Alexios and his wife in the first instance, on their children in the second and on the empress' family in the final case”.¹⁵⁰ However, this list demonstrates very well whom Eirene Doukaina considered family and whom she did not. Furthermore, it shows that the Komnenos and Doukas family were clearly separated, even in the last years of Alexios' reign. The *typikon* of the Pantokrator Monastery founded by Ioannes II lists the

¹⁴⁷ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 261–268; Gerhold, *Empereur, Église et aristocratie laïque*, pp. 55–126; Grünbart, *Inszenierung*, pp. 41–43, 71; Kazhdan/ Ronchey, *L'aristocrazia*; Stankovic, *Komnini u Carigrady*, pp. 299–314.

¹⁴⁸ Cheynet, *Aristocracy and inheritance (11th–13th Centuries)*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁹ Gautier, *Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôméné*, pp. 118–125.

¹⁵⁰ Frankopan, *Kinship*, p. 32, n. 119.

names of his uncles and aunts from both sides of his family, indicating that the fusion of the Doukai and the Komnenoi happened only when the offspring of Alexios and Eirene started to rule.¹⁵¹

The often mentioned “kin obligation” only seemed to apply to individuals married to the imperial family and not to the rest of their family, for members of lineages that provided in-laws to the imperial family continued to rebel, such as the Diogenes, Katakalon Kekaumenos, Taronites and even Doukas¹⁵². The emperor’s in-laws acted, nonetheless, as bridges between the ruler and their rebellious relatives. Ioannes Taronites, the emperor’s nephew through his sister, was sent to convince or – in case of resistance – subdue Gregorios Taronites. Adrianos Komnenos was sent to persuade Nikephoros Diogenes, his brother-in-law, to reveal the names of other co-conspirators in exchange for his amnesty. In both cases, Alexios I’s emissaries failed. Ioannes Taronites had to subdue his cousin by force and Nikephoros Diogenes resisted his brother-in-law’s pledges, the rebel only revealed the names of some of his co-conspirators under torture.¹⁵³

The marriage unions forged by his mother before his reign were not fully effective as a warrant of political support, but the marriages organized by Alexios I himself were more successful. Although his flirtation with the idea of divorcing Eirene Doukaina in order to marry Maria of Alania caused deep concern among Eirene’s relatives and supporters, resulting in internal conflicts within the ruling group, the marriage with Eirene Doukaina assured political, administrative and military support when it was needed. There is no reason to doubt that the empress’ brothers, Michael and Ioannes Doukas, and her brother-in-law, Georgios Palaiologos, served faithfully under Alexios although they may have supported Leon of Chalcedon’s staunch resistance out of dislike to Anna Dalassene and discontent with the position she enjoyed in her son’s government and court, which in normal conditions should have been occupied by Eirene. Meanwhile, the group supporting Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas were not connected with the ruling group because Konstantinos Doukas and Eirene Doukaina were third degree cousins, but because Maria of Alania had a deal with Alexios I.

¹⁵¹ Gautier, *Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator*, pp. 40–45.

¹⁵² There is an Exazenos Doukas involved with Michael Anemas plot. It is not possible to know how this personage was linked with Eirene Doukaina or Konstantinos Doukas. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 4: οἱ Ἐξαζηνοὶ καλούμενοι, ὃ τε Δούκας καὶ ὁ Ὑαλέας, ἄνδρες ἐκθυμότατοι τῶν πρόποτε γεγενημένων πρὸς μάχας. On this person, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Konstantinos 15011; Polemis, *The Doukas*, p. 119.

¹⁵³ These episodes will be thoroughly analysed in the following chapters.

It is important to highlight the clear fact that the kernel of the ruling group that took power in 1081 was marked by conflicting ambitions: Anna Dalassene against Ioannes Doukas' family and Maria of Alania against Eirene Doukaina. Consequently, Alexios I acted as an arbiter. At times, he was successful in appeasing the conflict, as in the case of Leon of Chalcedon controversy. At times, he was not, as with Maria of Alania. Alexios I broke the agreement settled at the beginning of his reign by removing Konstantinos Doukas from the succession line in favor of his own son and thereby forcing them into the opposition.

Another successful union was forged with the aristocratic families from Adrianople. After Konstantinos Doukas died, Alexios I married his first daughter, Anna Komnene, to Nikephoros Bryennios, the grandson of the homonymous rebel blinded after being defeated by Alexios Komnenos during Nikephoros III's reign. Afterward, Alexios extended his connection with the aristocracy of Adrianople by marrying his other daughters to members of distinguished lineages from that city, Maria to Nikephoros Euphorbenos Katakalon and Theodora to Konstantinos Kourtikes.¹⁵⁴ Actually, this alliance was only possible because Nikephoros Bryennios, still a person of immense influence and authority within the army and in Adrianople, decided to lend Alexios I his support.

Because of Alexios' role in the repression of his rebellion, the population of Adrianople refused to hail Alexios as emperor in 1081, most likely at Bryennios' command.¹⁵⁵ Afterwards, Nikephoros Bryennios is reported as advising the emperor before the battle of Dristra in 1087.¹⁵⁶ It is probable that Alexios formalized Bryennios' position in Adrianople with a concessions and a title, as he did with Theodoros Gabras in Trebizond.¹⁵⁷ In 1094 or 1095, Nikephoros Bryennios proved his loyalty to Alexios I by refusing to recognize the pretender as Leon Diogenes.¹⁵⁸

One wonders what the reason for this change of heart was. It is important to mention that Nikephoros Bryennios also tried to become emperor through a military rebellion. On that occasion, he was faced with the rejection of the population of

¹⁵⁴ On unions between Komnenoi and members of Thracian aristocracy, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 370–372; Frankopan, *Kinship*, p. 7; Magdalino, *The Empire*, pp. 202–205; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 274f; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 33, pp. 198–203; 38, pp. 259–264.

¹⁵⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2, vi, 10. On Nikephoros Bryennios, the elder, Gautier, *Introduction in Nikephoros Bryennios*, *Hyle Historias*, pp. 16–20.

¹⁵⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 10, iii, 6.

¹⁵⁷ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 371.

¹⁵⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 10, ii–iv; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 744.

Constantinople, who had already chosen Nikephoros Botaneiates. Nevertheless, Nikephoros Bryennios, or better his brother Ioannes Bryennios, who was sent to Constantinople to take the city in his name, did not besiege the city nor attempted to storm it. They set houses in the outskirts on fire in order to force an acclamation by the people of the city, but these actions only reinforced their rejection of the Bryennioi.

Considering that episode, it is reasonable to conjecture that Nikephoros Bryennios was impressed by the form Alexios seized power. Instead of waiting for the acclamations of the citizens, as did Nikephoros Bryennios, Alexios bribed a unit responsible for a sector of the wall allowing him to introduce his troops into the city that had chosen an old and incapable emperor rather than Nikephoros Bryennios so as to fill their pockets with resources that the Empire no longer possessed.

This hypothesis coheres with the proposal made by Leonora Neville in her analysis of the *Material for History*. She compares the representations of Nikephoros Bryennios and Alexios Komnenos in this work. While Bryennios, the younger, presents his grandfather as an honorable general, an embodiment of the Roman *mos maiorum*, Alexios Komnenos is displayed as a trickster with more flexible values. In the end, Neville wondered whether this negative image might have had a positive aspect. It was as if Nikephoros Bryennios agreed that the difficult times required morally flexible emperors like Alexios I, rather than an honorable hero like his ancestor.¹⁵⁹ This opinion accords well with Nikephoros Bryennios senior's change of heart and his decision to lend Alexios I his support. Alexios Komnenos did what needed to be done and what Bryennios could not do because of his honor. The younger Bryennios may have inherited this ambiguous opinion about his father-in-law from his revered ancestor.

¹⁵⁹ Neville, *Heroes*, p. 176.

4. 1091–1100: The Rise of the *Porphyrogenetoi* and the Anemas Conspiracy

The first ten years of Alexios I's reign were much contested. His violent usurpation and his first measures as an emperor were a source of constant opposition. Even among his most important supporters, doubt and concealed dissatisfaction were present. The frontiers between internal and external opposition, namely the expressions of discontentment among supporters and subversive movements that sought Alexios' deposition, could not be clearly differentiated, for it is observable that members of both groups took the same side in particular events, such as in the crisis resulting from Leon of Chalcedon's resistance to the appropriation of ecclesiastical property. This situation is understandable, for in Byzantium the preceding years were marked by weakly legitimized governments and numerous usurpations.

Regardless of his actions, Alexios I was in a weak position as emperor simply because he reigned at that time, but his violent coup d'état and his controversial measures to address the Empire's problems made him even more contested. His perspectives were accordingly not good. The opposition to him most probably saw him as a temporary annoyance that was soon to be disposed of. Furthermore, his allies did not lend their full-hearted support to a regime that could crumble at any moment.

The Byzantine victory in Levounion over the Petchenegs in April 29th, 1091 changed the situation. According to Byzantine views, military victory signified that Alexios had divine approval and legitimacy for his so far contested initiatives.¹ The victory meant that Alexios' position as a ruler was more secure, affording the perspective of a long reign – Alexios was about thirty-five years old by the time of the battle – and of the establishment of a dynasty. Consequently, the political players were forced to adopt a clear position. The time for partial support and cautious opposition was over. Either the Komnenian *status quo* was to be accepted or not: in the latter case, the natural consequence was to enter the ranks of the subversive opposition. In Anna Komnene's account of the following conspiracies, a marked change is observable. Instead of intrigues by mysterious groups and anonymous individuals that characterized her report on the oppositional movements of the first years of her father's reign, she describes open conspiracies carried out by people mentioned by name. Many of them were very illustrious and some very close to Alexios I.

¹ On the role of military victories in the legitimacy of emperor's rules, see McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, passim.

4.1 The Diogenes Crisis and the Uprising of the *Porphyrogennetoi* (1094–1096)

At the time of Alexios' seizure of power, there were four male *porphyrogennetoi* alive: Konstantios Doukas, the son of Konstantinos X Doukas, Konstantinos Doukas, the son of Michael VII Doukas, and Leon Diogenes and Nikephoros Diogenes, both sons of Romanos IV Diogenes. It was a significant development. Since Zoe, born in 980, no *porphyrogennetos* was produced until the birth of Konstantios Doukas in 1060. Because of the importance of the purple birth for legitimacy during the Macedonian dynasty, it was natural that Alexios, a usurper, could have considered the *porphyrogennetoi* a menace.² However, instead of exiling them as his predecessors had done, he addressed his efforts to maintain a friendly relationship with them. Actually, he used the imperial claim of Konstantinos Doukas to justify his coup. With Konstantios Doukas and Leon Diogenes, he managed to be on good terms, but both of them died early: Konstantios Doukas in the battle of Dyrrachium in 1081³ and Leon Diogenes in Dristra in 1087.⁴ Nikephoros Diogenes, however, did not acknowledge the new government, offering constant resistance to Alexios I.

4.1.1 The Diogenai after Manzikert

Nikephoros Diogenes was exiled with his brother and his mother, the Empress Eudokia Makrembolitissa, to the Kyperoudes Monastery after the deposition and blinding of his father in 1072.⁵ Although Anna Komnene attributes the return of the Diogenai to court to her father, it happened during Nikephoros III Botaneiates' reign. He brought Eudokia Makrembolitissa, who had been exiled by her own son, Michael VII, back.⁶ More importantly, Nikephoros III considered marrying Eudokia Makrembolitissa.⁷ Eventually, he was convinced by Ioannes Doukas to marry Maria of Alania instead. When Alexios took the throne, he continued Nikephoros III's

² On the *porphyrogennetos* and *porphyrogenesis* as legitimacy factor, Dagron, Emperor and Priest, pp. 32–44.

³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 4, vi, 7.

⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 7, iii, 8.

⁵ On Nikephoros Diogenes and his conspiracy in 1094, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vi–x; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 742. See also Buckler, *Anna Comnena. A Study*, pp. 89–97, 251–256, 287; Chalandon, *Essai*, p. 150; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry 128, pp. 98f, also pp. 395f; Cheynet, *Grandeur et décadence des Diogénai*, pp. 578–580; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. The Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes*, pp. 257–274; Joannou, *Christliche Metaphysik in Byzanz I*, pp. 28f; Leib, *Complots à Byzance*, pp. 256–274; Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 203; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 99f; 119–122, 301–311; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 233–237; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, p. 157.

⁶ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 304.

⁷ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 722.

conciliatory policy towards the Diogenai. He returned the imperial honors to Eudokia Makrembolitissa and took the Diogenes brothers under his care.⁸

Anna Komnene describes Leon Diogenes as faithful and satisfied with the position given to him by Alexios I. Nikephoros, however, is described as plotting against Alexios incessantly. Anna Komnene reports that he enjoyed wide support among the soldiers, so that he addressed his efforts to gathering the support of the army officers and the senators. She states that his plotting was successful, for Nikephoros managed to acquire the support of Michael Taronites, the *panhypersebastos* and the emperor's brother-in-law. She reports that Alexios was well informed of Nikephoros' constant plotting, but instead of being angry, the emperor smothered Nikephoros with even more benefactions.⁹

Anna Komnene reports that one of the attacks by Nikephoros Diogenes against the emperor was an unsuccessful murder attempt, carried out by an assassin of Armenian-Turkish origins when Alexios was playing polo.¹⁰ It is important to note that Nikephoros Diogenes was born during the reign of his father Romanos IV Diogenes (1068–1071); consequently, he was thirteen years old or less when Alexios took power. Consequently, it is hard to imagine an adolescent – even a one born in the purple – having so much articulation within court without protectors who remained unnamed by Anna Komnene.

The presence of Diogenes at the court and his conspiracies reached an unbearable point, which demanded an exile, even a glorified one. We have already pointed out the double character of the governorship of Crete given by Alexios to Nikephoros. It was both a privilege and an ousting, for, according to Anna Komnene, Diogenes had to live there.¹¹ We lack evidence to demonstrate whether this imperial decree was implemented and Nikephoros Diogenes was in fact sent to Crete. In an article on the rebellions in Cyprus and Crete, Peter Frankopan conjectures that Nikephoros Diogenes was not sent to Crete, but to Cyprus, and was the same person as Rapsomates, the rebel leader of Cyprus. He affirms that “Rapsomates” was a nickname that meant “sewed-eyes”, which Anna Komnene would have used to name Diogenes because of his fate after his last conspiracy against Alexios I as well as to hide his real identity. To support this thesis, he proposes that Anna Komnene and Michael Glykas

⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vi, 1–3.

⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vi.

¹⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vii, 5–6.

¹¹ See Ch. 3, fn. 14.

were mistaken in their geographical references. Anna Komnene may have reported wrongly where Diogenes' command was located, and Glykas mistakenly informed us that Rapsomates was the rebellious leader in Crete, not in Cyprus. Although it is possible that both Constantinopolitan authors may have committed mistakes concerning their knowledge of the world outside the Theodosian walls, Frankopan does not give satisfactory answers to the questions of why Anna Komnene did not describe both individuals as being the same person and how Rapsomates is described as untrained in war when Nikephoros Diogenes was admired by all for his martial abilities.¹² Nevertheless, Frankopan interestingly observes that Diogenes disappeared after the battle of Dristra in 1087, and reappeared during the campaign against Bolkan in 1094.¹³ Although it is very unlikely that Nikephoros Diogenes was Rapsomates and was sent to Cyprus, Diogenes could have been sent to Crete and there, he continued with his conspiracy by capitalizing on existing local dissatisfaction.¹⁴

Brought back to the capital, Nikephoros continued to conspire, but after the victory in Levounion in 1091, the political scenario was different, and he was no longer an adolescent but a grown man. In her account of his earlier activities, Anna Komnene conveys the image of a bright, charismatic young man, who was popular among the troops, but his efforts to gather support were unsuccessful since his movements were constantly reported to the emperor, who did not seem to take them seriously.

4.1.2 The Conspiracy near Serres: Anna Komnene's account.

This situation changed in 1094 as the emperor was conducting a campaign in Dalmatia.¹⁵ Anna Komnene, who reported the whole plot in detail, describes two more attempts to murder the emperor. In the first attempt, Nikephoros pitched his tent beside the emperor's tent in order to facilitate his access. Manuel Philokales warned the emperor about Nikephoros' ruse, but Alexios ignored the risk once again. During the night, Nikephoros managed to enter the emperor's tent, where he found him and the

¹² Bekker, *Michaelis Glycae annales*, p. 620; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Revolts on Crete and Cyprus*, pp. 382–402.

¹³ Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Revolts on Crete and Cyprus*, pp. 398f.

¹⁴ This possibility will be further considered at the Ch. 5.1.

¹⁵ This chronology was long established with the help of the narrative sequence by Anna Komnene. Since she occasionally subordinates the order of events to her literary intentions, Frankopan questions this dating method. However, analyzing the religious holidays mentioned by Anna Komnene in her account, he confirmed that the conspiracy took place in June 1094, see Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. The Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes*, pp. 257–274.

empress asleep.¹⁶ Nikephoros did not fulfill his intentions because he was spotted by a slave girl. Later in the campaign, when the emperor was lodging in the property of Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas near Serres, Nikephoros Diogenes tried to approach the emperor with a dagger while he took a bath, but was stopped by Tatikios, who was then guarding the emperor. Considering himself discovered, Nikephoros thought of fleeing to one of the properties of Maria of Alania,¹⁷ and asked Konstantinos Doukas for his horse, but was denied on the justification that the horse was a gift from the emperor; therefore, it could not be given away.¹⁸

The next steps in Anna's account are not very clear. Firstly, she reports that Alexios was informed of each of these murder attempts, but he did not arrest Nikephoros and continued his advance. His only action was to leave Konstantinos Doukas behind, using his fragile health as an excuse.¹⁹ However, a few paragraphs further on, Anna Komnene mentions that Alexios finally decided to take action against Nikephoros while he was in Konstantinos' residence, and arrested him.²⁰ In the sequence, she reports that Nikephoros followed the army, but it is not clear whether he does that voluntarily or as a prisoner.²¹ Afterwards, Alexios sent Adrianos Komnenos, the emperor's brother and Nikephoros' brother-in-law, to convince Nikephoros to confess and to name his co-conspirators. Although Adrianos Komnenos tried to convince him by recalling the first murder attempt while Alexios was playing polo, perhaps also to prove the emperor's mercy and that he enjoyed God's favor, he was unsuccessful.

The emperor sent a certain Mouzakes accompanied by Gregorios Kamateros under order to arrest him officially and persuade him to confess. According to Anna Komnene, Nikephoros was not to be mistreated, but Mouzakes ignored the emperor's

¹⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, v, 2–4.

¹⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, v, 4–6.

¹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vii, 2.

¹⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, v, 6: καὶ ὁ μὲν βασιλεὺς τριταῖος ἐκεῖθεν ἔξεισι· τὸν δὲ Κωνσταντῖνον αὐτοῦ που καταλελοίπει ῥαστώνης χάριν δεδιῶς τὸ ἀπαλὸν καὶ ἀσύνηθες τοῦ νεανίου τότε πρῶτως τῆς ἐνεγκαμένης πρὸς ἐκστρατεῖαν ἐξεληλυθότος· ἦν γὰρ μονογενὴς τῇ μητρὶ. καὶ ὁ αὐτοκράτωρ σφόδρα τοῦ νεανίσκου κηδόμενος πάσης ἀνέσεως συνεχῶρει ἐπαπολαύειν αὐτὸν σὺν τῇ βασιλίδι μητρὶ, ἅμα δὲ καὶ ὡς ἴδιον ἀπάρτι τέκνον ἐξόχως φιλῶν τοῦτον. (The emperor left that place on the third day. He left behind Konstantinos in the same place for his rest because he feared for the weak and unexperienced character of the boy, who at that time went away for a military expedition for the first time. He was indeed the only son to his mother. Since the emperor also cared a lot for the boy, he allowed that he together with his mother, the empress, enjoy all indulgences, for he loved him above others as if he were his own son).

²⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vii, 2: καὶ εἰς ἓν τὸ πᾶν συναγαγὼν δεῖν ἔκρινε κατασχεῖν τὸν Νικηφόρον. (After he considered all things, he decided that was necessary to withhold Nikephoros)

²¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vii, 3.

order and tortured him.²² Under torture, Diogenes signed a confession. During an inspection, Mouzakes found letters that proved that Nikephoros not only attempted to draw the highest officers in the army and the bureaucracy into his conspiracy but also that he had the support of Maria of Alania²³ even though Anna Komnene stated that Maria did not agree with murdering Alexios.²⁴ Surprised by the number of people involved in the plot, Alexios I concluded that few were worth his trust.²⁵ However, Anna Komnene tells us that the emperor decided not to arrest every person involved, for he was not able to take so many people into custody. Consequently, he arrested and exiled Nikephoros Diogenes and Katakalon Kekaumenos to Kaisaropolis. Alexios also banned Michael Taronites and another person, whose name was not mentioned by Anna, and confiscated their properties. The rest was left unpunished by the emperor and he approached them with positive gestures.²⁶

Anna Komnene describes the tense moments after the emperor was informed of the extent of the conspiracy. Alexios summoned all the officers to his tent, where he was surrounded by those family members not involved in the plot, and the Varangian guard.²⁷ Then, he addressed his audience, reminding them that he loved Nikephoros Diogenes, was not responsible for his father's deposition and had tolerated his plotting. Subsequently, Anna Komnene reports that everybody present hailed him out of fear. Alexios then informed them that he would not persecute those suspected of being involved in the plot.²⁸ A messenger was sent – without Alexios' knowledge, according to Anna Komnene – with orders to blind Nikephoros Diogenes and Katakalon Kekaumenos.²⁹

Later, Alexios Komnenos returned Nikephoros Diogenes' properties, but he did not return to court, spending the rest of his life on his lands. In his self-imposed exile, Anna Komnene informs us that he devoted himself to studies, especially geometry. Diogenes was also interested in spiritual matters, which, according to Anna Komnene, led him to heretic positions. Despite his scholarly and religious interests, Nikephoros

²² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, viii, 1.

²³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, viii, 2.

²⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, viii, 2.

²⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, viii, 3.

²⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, viii, 4.

²⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, ix, 2.

²⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, ix, 1–6.

²⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, x, 2.

continued to plot. For this reason, he was summoned by the emperor and forced to confess again.³⁰

This conspiracy was reported by Ioannes Zonaras and Anna Komnene. While Zonaras' account is very abridged and does not add new information or data that contradicts the Anna Komnene's account, the account given by Anna Komnene of the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes is comprehensive and detailed. Along with the conspiracy of Anemas, this account is the most extensive of all plots and rebellions reported by Anna Komnene. This illustrates how significant it was for the account of her father's reign. Furthermore, it permits a deeper study of the internal workings of the exercise of opposition as well as of the imperial reactions towards them. Accordingly, we shall pose some guiding questions in order to understand this conspiracy in the larger picture of the oppositional movements in the reign of Alexios I. Who were the participants? Why did they desire Alexios' deposition? Moreover, what action did they take to achieve their aims?

If we are to believe Anna Komnene's report, Alexios was very surprised and disconcerted by the great numbers involved in Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy. The document of Nikephoros Diogenes, discovered by Mouzakes, revealed that he approached many officials and senators as well as some of Alexios' relatives. Although Anna Komnene does not affirm that every one of them conspired against Alexios, she acknowledges that almost the whole aristocracy was under suspicion. Separating the wheat from the chaff would require a thorough investigation, for which Alexios did not possess enough resources.

4.1.2.1 The Conspirators

Alexios adopted one of few violent actions against the ringleaders, Nikephoros Diogenes and Katakalon Kekaumenos. He ordered that Diogenes should be tortured and, afterwards, that he and Kekaumenos should be blinded. Although Anna Komnene states that this was done without her father's consent, it is possibly untrue. The constant plotting, the entrée he enjoyed inside the highest ranks of the elite, the support he managed to gather within the imperial family, his purple birth and his popularity among the troops, made Nikephoros Diogenes an extremely serious threat. In order to neutralize it, Alexios applied a method often adopted by his predecessors, blinding.³¹

³⁰ Anna Komnene, 9, x, 2–3.

³¹ On blinding and other forms of imperial reactions to opposition, see Ch. 6.4.

The other ringleader, Katakalon Kekaumenos, is an enigma. He is only mentioned in this episode and *en passant* by Anna Komnene. She does not provide any information on who he was and if he was related to the other Katakalon Kekaumenos who supported Isaakios I, Alexios' uncle, in his rebellion in 1057. Nevertheless, it is very unlikely that they are the same person. The first Katakalon Kekaumenos began his career at the end of the 1030s, which means that he would be in his eighties by the time of Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy.³²

Anyhow, the participation of a Katakalon Kekaumenos, a descendant or a relative of a key ally of Isaakios I, Alexios' imperial uncle, would add one more source of embarrassment for the emperor in this event. The participation of some of his family members made this plot even more awkward for the emperor. The first we hear of is Michael Taronites.³³ He was connected with the Komnenoi long before Alexios' takeover, for he was married to Maria Komnene, Alexios' older sister, before 1067.³⁴ Even though he is not mentioned in the events that led to Alexios' coronation as emperor, Michael Taronites was endowed with the newly created titles *protosebastos* and *protovestiaros*. He was later appointed *panhypersebastos*, a title also invented by Alexios, and raised to the same level as *kaisar*.³⁵ He is not mentioned until the conspiracy and, after falling into disgrace, he was no longer mentioned.

Equally problematic was Maria of Alania on the list of Diogenes' co-conspirators. Although thirteen years had passed since Alexios took power and he was, by that point, the emperor in his own right, especially after the decisive victory in Levounion, no one forgot the key role Maria of Alania played in his usurpation. She adopted him, gave him free access to the palace, provided him with very important information and – most importantly – lent Alexios Komnenos her son's legitimacy.

The scholarly literature on the involvement of Konstantinos Doukas in the conspiracy seems hesitant to confirm it. Authors like Demetrios Polemis, Basile Skoulatos, and Jean-Claude Cheynet deny his participation.³⁶ Others, such as Victoria Gerhold, Perikles Joannou, Peter Frankopan, and recently Larisa Vilimonović accept it

³² Savvides, *The Byzantine Family of Kekaumenos*, pp. 12–27; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 163f.

³³ On Michael Taronites, Adontz, *Les Taronites en Arménie*, pp. 244–247; Nikolaros, *Die Taronitai*, pp. 239–246; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 211f; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 11, 64–66.

³⁴ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 6, p. 85.

³⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, iv, 2. On the new hierarchy established by Alexios I, Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, pp. 34–40; Stiernon, *Notes*, pp. 222–243, especially 227f.

³⁶ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 370; Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 60–63; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 57–60; Vilimonović, *Structure*, pp. 219–227.

but do not explain it properly.³⁷ As Frankopan highlights, the participation of Maria of Alania implied almost automatically Konstantinos Doukas' involvement.

Anna Komnene provides clear evidence to confirm it. It all happened at Konstantinos Doukas' property, he was the first person Nikephoros Diogenes looked for when he noticed that he was discovered, Alexios Komnenos decided to leave Konstantinos behind when the army left and, after this event, both Konstantinos and Maria of Alania disappeared from the registers. Furthermore, Anna Komnene informs us about an imperial order to disseminate a false rumor, according to which Konstantinos Doukas informed the emperor of the plot.³⁸ Anna Komnene makes it clear that the emperor invented this gossip in order to convince everyone that Konstantinos Doukas was not involved. If Alexios felt forced to invent a story that dissociates Konstantinos from the conspiracy, it probably means that Konstantinos was somehow involved. The reasons given to justify both Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas' independent agency are not convincing.³⁹ Since the deposition of Michael VII Doukas, her first husband, in 1078, Maria of Alania only appears in the historiographical sources to defend her son's imperial rights, so it is hard to imagine her doing something different conspiring with Diogenes. Likewise, it is hard to believe that Konstantinos Doukas, an adult man by 1094, would allow his mother to conspire against the emperor in his name without his consent.⁴⁰

Peter Frankopan suspects the involvement of the *mezas domestikos* Adrianos Komnenos in the plot.⁴¹ He assembled evidence of varied significance. As observed in the crisis caused by the accusations against Ioannes Komnenos in early-1090s, Adrianos Komnenos had a disruptive influence in the family. He was married to Nikephoros

³⁷ Frankopan, *Kinship*, pp. 25f; Gerhold, *Église et aristocratie laïque*, p. 58; Joannou, *Christliche Metaphysik in Byzanz I*, p. 28.

³⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 9, viii, 2: καὶ μέντοι καὶ διετήρησε τὸν ἀγνοοῦντα ὑποκριθεὶς δι' ἣν πρὸς αὐτὴν εἶχε πίστιν καὶ ὁμολογίαν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ τὰ τῆς βασιλείας ἀναδέξασθαι σκῆπτρα, διεδίδοτο δὲ πανταχοῦ τὴν τοῦ Διογένους βουλὴν παρὰ τοῦ πορφυρογεννίτου Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ βασιλέως καὶ υἱοῦ αὐτῆς διαμνησθῆναι τῷ βασιλεῖ, κἂν ἄλλως εἶχε τὸ πρᾶγμα (Indeed he [the emperor Alexios] observed closely, while pretending to be ignorant, because of her to whom he had an agreement and faith also before he received the scepter of the imperial power, but he spread everywhere that the conspiracy of Diogenes was revealed to the emperor by Konstantinos porphyrogennitos, her son and that of the emperor, even if the reality was different.)

³⁹ Cheynet, for example, states that Maria of Alania decided to support Nikephoros Diogenes “car elle n'avait plus rien à prendre à un changement dynastique”. In my opinion, it is not a good reason to join a murder conspiracy against the emperor, Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 370.

⁴⁰ He was born in 1074, therefore he was twenty years-old on the occasion, see Tiftixoglu, *Zum Mitkaisertum des Konstantin Dukas*, pp. 97–100. The separation between childhood and adulthood was not clear in Byzantine society, but it happened when the boy or girl was between 16 or 18 year-old. Herrin, *Judith/ Kazhdan, Alexander/ Cutler, Anthony*, Art. “Childhood”, in: *Kazhdan, ODB*, 2, pp. 420f.

⁴¹ On Adrianos Komnenos, see Ch. 3 fn. 10.

Diogenes' half-sister. Adrianos Komnenos was excluded from the list of people to be commemorated in the *typikon* of the Kecharitomene Monastery, founded by Eirene Doukaina, and he was only listed by his title without his name in the list in *typikon* of Pantokrator Monastery, founded by the Emperor Ioannes II. In addition, he had supposedly reacted with fear when he was sent by Alexios to convince Nikephoros to reveal the names of his co-conspirators; this would have hinted that he had participated or had knowledge of this conspiracy. Anna Komnene does not mention him after the failure of the coup.

The evidence mentioned by Frankopan is not strong enough to sustain Adrianos' participation or previous knowledge of the conspiracy, for there are other and more plausible forms of understanding it. As pointed out, marriage connections did not conditionally lead to political association. His disappearance from the *Alexiad* raises suspicion, but he had still received letters from Theophylaktos of Ohrid asking him to intercede with the emperor against rumors spread against Theophylaktos in court. Margaret Mullett dates this letter to 1104 and Gautier between 1097 and 1104.⁴² Anyhow, it is clear that Adrianos did not disappear from court after 1094. Furthermore, he was considered by Theophylaktos of Ohrid as still able to influence his brother.

His absence in the Kecharitomene *typikon* commemoration lists and of his name in Pantokrator *typikon* can also be easily explained by the fact that not only Adrianos Komnenos' name is absent from the Kecharitomene *typikon* but also those of all Alexios I's siblings, which is mentioned later by Frankopan himself.⁴³ In the Pantokrator list, Adrianos Komnenos is not the only one to be registered by his title or office. Actually, almost every commemorated relative is listed by his title or kinship with the emperor.⁴⁴

Finally, the reaction of Adrianos Komnenos to his brother's order to talk with Nikephoros Diogenes was in my opinion over-interpreted. Anna Komnene says that Adrianos Komnenos "fulfilled the order although he was completely low-spirited"⁴⁵ There are many possible reasons to explain the low-spirits (*athymia*) of Adrianos Komnenos, thus it is rash to assume that it was due to his participation or to

⁴² Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 85, pp. 444–451; and 98, pp. 498–505; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ohrid*, pp. 327

⁴³ Gautier, *Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôméné*, pp. 118–125.

⁴⁴ Gautier, *Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator*, pp. 41–43.

⁴⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vii, 4: δὲ ἀθυμίας πλήρης γενόμενος ὁμῶς ἐπλήρου τὸ κελευσθέν.

foreknowledge of the plot. One more likely explanation is that Adrianos Komnenos was embarrassed that his relative by marriage was conspiring to murder his brother.

Even though Adrianos had exerted a disturbing influence in the Komnenos family, the arguments presented by Frankopan are not convincing enough to determine Adrianos' participation in the plot. More difficult to identify and to interpret are the participants mentioned by Anna Komnene as groups, such as the highest members of the army and bureaucracy, as well the soldiers.

4.1.2.2 The Making of the Nikephoros Diogenes Conspiracy and its Causes

The reasons for the conspiracy are not easily determined. Since Anna Komnene was trying to compose an apologetic account of her father's reign, she naturally does not provide any justification other than that Nikephoros Diogenes and his partners were ambitious and ungrateful. Revealing the real motives would give voice to negative assessments of Alexios' actions as emperor. So far, the most influential interpretation is Cheynet's, according to whom Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy was an expression of the dissatisfaction of the Anatolian aristocracy with Alexios' lack of efforts to retake the Eastern provinces from the Turks and his focus on protecting the Western provinces.⁴⁶

The only clear evidence that Alexios I was confronted with dissatisfactions for his inaction in Anatolia is found in the summary of her father's deeds by Anna Komnene. She recounts that after Romanos IV Diogenes' defeat, the Empire suffered constant invasions, cities were destroyed, and Christians slaughtered, but her father changed this image by being the first emperor to enter Asia since Nikephoros II Phokas and Basileios II.⁴⁷ This could be a response to criticism of Alexios' policies and inaction concerning Anatolia. Moreover, in her introduction to the Anemas conspiracy about 1100, Anna Komnene criticizes those who demanded a more aggressive external policy from her father. She does not mention Anatolia particularly, but it can be assumed that these critics were dissatisfied with Alexios's actions in the East, for the situation in the Balkans had been more or less solved since the victory in Levounion in 1091. However,

⁴⁶ This interpretation is adopted by Élisabeth Malamut. It also influenced Catherine Holmes in her understanding of Skylitzes' Chronicle, for she reads this chronicle as a work accomplished under Alexios Komnenos' supervision, whose goal was to defend his emphasis on the defense of the Balkans instead of the reconquering of Anatolia, but the aristocracy was more interested in fighting the Turks and therefore did not approve Alexios' policies, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 365–367; Cheynet, *Se révolter*, p. 65; Holmes, *Basil*, p. 232f; Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 189; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 301–307.

⁴⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 15, x, 5.

we will see that this dissatisfaction was linked with that particular period and it cannot explain the opposition that led to the Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy in 1094.⁴⁸

Although this hypothesis cannot be simply excluded, it is questionable whether the pressure within the displaced aristocracy to reconquer Anatolia was as strong as imagined by Cheynet. As already seen, the Byzantine aristocratic identity depended mostly on the state. A secure situation could only be warranted if family members held good positions in the imperial apparatus, whether in the army, in the bureaucracy, or in the palace. Property, especially landed property, was important, but its status was vulnerable to political uncertainties. The most successful houses were the ones who invested more heavily in the state than in their native provinces. Therefore, geographical mobility was common among these families. The Komnenos family is an obvious example. They probably originated in Thrace in the 10th century, were established in Paphlagonia in the mid-11th century and, after 1081, they were mostly in Constantinople as a ruling group and several members of this family had land in Macedonia.⁴⁹ Cheynet himself demonstrates that the most common reaction of the Asiatic aristocracy in the face of the Turkish invasions after 1071 was to go to Constantinople and expect to receive imperial land in Europe, as happened with the Komnenoi, Doukai, Diogenai, Melissenoi, Bourtzai, and Pakourianoï.⁵⁰

Naturally, the beneficiaries represented a small part of the displaced aristocracy, so that those left out could have formed a group of those disgruntled with Alexios and his administration that supported Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy. However, the demand was for land anywhere in the Empire, not necessarily in Anatolia. Furthermore, even if Alexios had conducted a successful campaign to retake the Eastern provinces from day one of his reign, the regained provinces would continue to be less secure than the Balkan provinces due to Turkish raids, which were independent of the Turkish established authorities and therefore would not have been easily stopped. Consequently, the possession and exploitation of land (as well as their fiscal revenues) in the Balkans would still be much more advantageous than in Anatolia. Accordingly, the pressure to reconquer Anatolia probably was not so extensive among the displaced elite and mostly limited to the emperor's need of more lands at his disposal to reward supporters.⁵¹

⁴⁸ See Ch. 4.3.

⁴⁹ See Ch. 2.2. See also Bartusi, *Land and Privilege*, pp. 148–150.

⁵⁰ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 237–240.

⁵¹ Mark Whittow has already remarked the lack of involvement of the aristocracy in the Alexian initiatives to reconquer Anatolia, see Whittow, *How the East Was Lost*, pp. 55–69.

The list of participants can give further evidence of the motives behind the conspiracy. Anna Komnene gives us four names: Nikephoros Diogenes, Katakalon Kekaumenos, Michael Taronites, Maria of Alania and, indirectly, Konstantinos Doukas. It is interesting to remark that the Komnenoi were connected with both Taronitai and Diogenai at least a decade before 1081. Michael Taronites was married to Maria Komnene and Konstantinos Diogenes, Nikephoros Diogenes' brother, was betrothed to Theodora Komnene sometime after her father's death in 1067.⁵² The research dedicated to Komnenian inner politics, which strongly supports the existence of clans in the Byzantine aristocracy, commonly considers such unions as alliances between families in general. Yet it was much more complex. The marriage between Maria Komnene and Michael Taronites happened fourteen years before Alexios' rise as emperor in a completely different background. The highly unstable political scenario and the constant regime changes in the 11th century hindered the forging of long-term political alliances. Hence, these unions can be better assessed as political maneuvers with short-term horizons, with the ambitions of each family nucleus in mind. As a consequence, the developments in political scenario changed the relationship between these families, especially after Alexios' rise to power and the establishment of his new court hierarchy.

The government system founded by Alexios I was not only an aristocratic organization but also one that put the emperor's direct family – brothers and nephews – as well as Eirene Doukaina's brothers above other relatives by marriage. Although Alexios granted Nikephoros Diogenes the government of an important province, and Michael Taronites the second most important title of his newly founded hierarchy, the Komnenian system prioritized blood connections over male in-laws and their offspring.⁵³

Even if both Nikephoros Diogenes and Michael Taronites enjoyed position and status in Alexios' court, their offspring was fated to be granted a lower position in the hierarchy. Since canonical rules imposed severe limitations to remarrying into the imperial family, an enhancement of their position was out of question, so the natural

⁵² Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 6, 84–87; Nikolaros, *Die Taronitai*, pp. 239f.

⁵³ Barbara Hill understands this policy as an effort to demote the female issue over their male counterparts, but it is more reasonable to consider it as way to secure that the imperial sons would always have a better position than their male in-laws would, cf, Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, pp. 100–102; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, pp. 34–40; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 148–150; Stiernon, *Notes*, pp. 222–243

process was a deterioration of the descendant's position.⁵⁴ This was a completely different scenario than the existing one while the former court hierarchy existed. Each new generation could theoretically improve a family's position by holding higher offices and titles. This ceased to exist with the new hierarchy implemented by Alexios. Therefore, it is not a surprise that both Taronites and Diogenes did not accept their position as minor associates in a Komnenian government more than a decade after these marriage unions took place.⁵⁵

Further evidence that the conspiracy was also motivated by resistance against the new hierarchy is a letter sent by Gregorios Taronites, Michael Taronites' nephew, to the emperor. In 1103, Gregorios was appointed *doux* of Chaldia, but when he arrived there, he rebelled, arresting the former *doux* Dabatenos.⁵⁶ Eventually, this rebellion was repressed by Alexios, who sent Ioannes Taronites, his nephew and Gregorios' cousin, to negotiate with him and, if he refused, to arrest him. Before Ioannes was sent to Trebizond, Alexios tried to convince Gregorios to end his rebellion through correspondence. Gregorios answered the emperor by sending him a long letter, in which he insulted not only the senators and army officials but also the emperor's relatives and in-laws.⁵⁷ The association between autonomous tendencies in the Pontos region and expressions of discontent with the new hierarchy created by Alexios Komnenos is evident in these rebellions.⁵⁸ Therefore, the participation of Michael Taronites in Nikephoros Diogenes' conspiracy in 1094, the rebellion of Gregorios Taronites in 1103 and 1104, and his insults to the emperor's family in the letter sent to Alexios Komnenos were clear acts of resistance to the proposed hierarchy.

Another insufficiently studied aspect of this conspiracy is the association of the ringleader Nikephoros Diogenes with the former Empress Maria of Alania and, consequently, Konstantinos Doukas, as well as the similarities between this alliance and the one forged in 1081, which brought Alexios Komnenos to power. Perikles Joannou states that the conspiracy was aimed at defending the imperial rights of Konstantinos

⁵⁴ On canonical barriers to endogamous marriages, see Schminck, Andreas, Art. "Marriage Impediments", in: Kazhdan, ODB, 2, p. 1306; Schminck, Andreas, Art. "Relationships, Degrees of", in: Kazhdan, ODB, 3, p. 1779.

⁵⁵ Paul Magdalino points to a similar direction when he interprets the Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy as an expression of Diogenes' dissatisfaction with the favored position that the Doukai had in Alexios' reign, Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 203.

⁵⁶ This rebellion will be thoroughly examined in the Ch. 5.2.

⁵⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 12, vii, 2.

⁵⁸ Lilie assesses this episode only from the point of view of the autonomous tendencies of the local aristocracies, Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 48–52.

Doukas, not Nikephoros Diogenes.⁵⁹ Although Anna Komnene possibly tries to conceal the participation of her former fiancé in a murder conspiracy against her father, the role of Nikephoros Diogenes should not be diminished. Thus, I propose an alternative interpretation of this alliance.

Evidently, Maria of Alania is mentioned in historiographical sources for her efforts to defend the imperial claims of her son, and it was not different in this particular case. The only difference is that Konstantinos Doukas was not a child anymore in 1094, so his participation and his approval of his mother's actions must be taken for granted. Both had reason to be disgruntled with Alexios. They provided him with legitimacy at the difficult beginning of his reign, only to be removed once he produced his male issue and assured his position through the decisive victory in Levounion. The alienation of Maria of Alania and Konstantinos Doukas, as well as their supporters, was a logical consequence of these actions.⁶⁰

The rapprochement between them and Nikephoros Diogenes is accordingly comprehensible. Konstantinos Doukas and Nikephoros Diogenes were both *porphyrogennetoi* whose claims were neglected by their fathers' successors. Moreover, they were closely related: Nikephoros was Konstantinos' uncle through Eudokia Makrembolitissa. The fact that Michael VII Doukas, Konstantinos Doukas' father, deposed Romanos IV Diogenes, Nikephoros Diogenes' father, and was responsible for his blinding does not seem to be an impediment to this alliance. The long-lived grudge between Anna Dalassene and Ioannes Doukas seems to be an exception in the 11th century Byzantine politics. This conspiracy is a clear example of how former enemies allied as easily as they turned their backs on former allies if the present political needs so demanded. Hence, it is possible to understand this conspiracy as an uprising of the *porphyrogennetoi*. With the death of Konstantios Doukas and Leon Diogenes, Konstantinos Doukas and Nikephoros Diogenes were the only non-Komnenian *porphyrogennetoi* alive. It should not be ignored that they are involved in the same conspiracy against Alexios shortly after he crowned his own son as co-emperor and withdrew this same title from his former partner, Konstantinos Doukas.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Joannou, *Christliche Metaphysik in Byzanz I*, p. 28.

⁶⁰ Vilimonović also believes that Konstantinos Doukas had a more important role in the conspiracy than Anna Komnene was ready to acknowledge, see Vilimonović, *Structure*, pp. 219–227.

⁶¹ Konstantinos died shortly after this conspiracy on 12 August 1094, Kouroupou/ Vannier, *Commémoraisons*, p. 67. See also in Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, Preface, pp. 65, 67.

The participants collectively mentioned by Anna Komnene are more complicated to be interpreted. It is interesting to remember that, according to Anna Komnene, Alexios I was not aware of the real extent of this conspiracy beyond the names provided by her. He knew that Diogenes had approached several members of the senate and the military, but he did not know who they were specifically and who were indeed involved in the murder conspiracy, for he decided not to investigate any further, presumably due to lack of resources, but most likely because he did not want to escalate tensions. Thus, we understand his insecurity, reported by Anna Komnene, as he assembled the officers after Nikephoros Diogenes confessed under torture. His decision restricts any interpretation of possible anonymous participants of the conspiracy. Nevertheless, if this conspiracy is juxtaposed with other oppositional movements during his reign, it is possible it found support among the groups benefited by the wide generosity fostered by his predecessors, who opposed the Alexian policies of limited generosity and who were targeted by Alexios' troops during his takeover.

The failure of the Diogenes conspiracy led to the rash decline of the Diogenes family, but not of its popularity.⁶² In the following winter, Alexios I faced a Cuman invasion led by a person who claimed to be Konstantinos or Leon Diogenes. Firstly, Pseudo-Diogenes roamed the streets of Constantinople announcing himself to be the son of the emperor defeated in Manzikert. As a result, Alexios sent him into exile in Cherson. From there, he fled to the Cumans. Leading them or being used by them as a puppet, Pseudo-Diogenes came back and advanced on Adrianople with Cuman allies. Since he was not recognized by Nikephoros Bryennios senior, he was arrested and blinded at the order of Anna Dalassene and Eustathios Kymineianos.⁶³

In general terms, scholars do not question Anna Komnene's statement that this man claiming to be a Diogenes was a pretender. Peter Frankopan is an exception. He is convinced by the attention accorded by Alexios Komnenos to this person that the man accompanying the Cumans was, in fact, a Diogenes, not necessarily Konstantinos or Leon.⁶⁴ However, more important than the discussion of whether this person was a

⁶² Cheynet, *Grandeur et décadence des Diogénai*, p. 580; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 351;

⁶³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, ii–iv; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 744; Russian Primary Chronicle, tr. Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, p. 180.

⁶⁴ Anna Komnene created confusion in her account because she claims that the impostor took the name of Leon Diogenes. Yet she reports later in text that this claim irritated her aunt, Theodora Komnene, described as Leo's widow, when she actually was the former fiancé of Konstantinos Diogenes, see Anna Komnene, 10, ii, 1–4; Cheynet argues that it was more likely that the pretender named himself Leon and not Konstantinos, for the former had died in Dristra in 1087 fighting the Petchenegs and probably his body was never found. Therefore, the Cumans could claim that they had captured Leon Diogenes on that

Diogenes or not, was that he was perceived as a danger by Alexios and able to convince the inhabitants of Dampolis to acclaim him as emperor.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Pseudo-Diogenes was not the only one claiming to be Diogenes at that time. In March 1106, Bohemond of Taranto returned to France “accompanied by the son of the Emperor Diogenes and other eminent Greeks and Thracians, whose suit against the Emperor Alexios for treacherously depriving them of the dignities of their ancestors further stirred up the warlike Franks to fury against him.”⁶⁶ Moreover, the Prince Vladimir Monomakh from Kiev sent his brother-in-law also called Leon Diogenes in 1116 to invade cities in the Danube region, but he was murdered by assassins sent by Alexios I.⁶⁷

4.2 The Synod of Blachernae in 1095: Recasting the Komnenian Alliance

Considering the organization of the Komnenian hierarchy after Alexios Komnenos' coronation, we can see how distressing the 1090s were. The *status quo* established in 1081, as reported by Anna Komnene and Ioannes Zonaras, was the following: Alexios Komnenos was crowned as emperor and, after some hesitation, Eirene Doukaina as empress, therefore rewarding her family for their support. Konstantinos Doukas, who lent Alexios legitimacy, was also crowned emperor. Isaakios Komnenos, who also held the ambition of being the emperor, but had to yield in favor of his brother, was compensated with the brand new title of *sebastokrator*, which surpassed all titles. This position reflected the role he enjoyed during his brother's reign. In the sequence, Nikephoros Melissenos and Michael Taronites, the emperor's two brother-in-laws through his sisters, were awarded the titles *kaisar* and *panhypersebastos* respectively, which were equal in importance and were ranged under the *sebastokrator*

occasion. Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 129, pp. 99f; Based on the Russian Primary Chronic, Frankopan conjectures that the person considered to be an impostor by Anna Komnene could have been Leon Diogenes indeed or, at least, one of Romanos IV's son. However, as in his conjectures on Adrianos Komnenos' participation in Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy, Frankopan overtaxes his evidence, see Frankopan, *Unravelling the Alexiad*, pp. 147–166.

⁶⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, iii, 1.

⁶⁶ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI, XI, 12, p. 68f: *Filium Diogenis augusti aliosque de Grecis seu Tracibus illustrium secum habebat; quorum querela de Alexio imperatore qui per prodicionem illis antecessorum stemmata suorum abstulerat, magis ad iram contra eum fecores Francos incitabat.* translation by Marjorie Chibnall, p. 70f.

⁶⁷ Cheynet, *Grandeur et décadence des Diogénai*, p. 580; Obolensky, *Six Byzantine Portraits*, p. 110f, fn. 66.

in the hierarchy. Next, Adrianos Komnenos was awarded the title of *protosebastos*.⁶⁸ This was the highest hierarchy in the Komnenian regime after its establishment and, in the next years, all of them had turned against either Alexios or Isaakios Komnenos

Although Nikephoros Melissenos seemed to be satisfied after giving up his imperial claims in exchange for the title of *kaisar* and a dominion in Thessaloniki, there is evidence that he did not maintain a good relationship with his in-laws.⁶⁹ His accusations against Ioannes Komnenos, son of the *sebastokrator* Isaakios and *doux* of Dyrrachium, are exemplary. As seen above, both Adrianos Komnenos and Nikephoros Melissenos made accusations against the emperor's nephew, enraging his father, the *sebastokrator*. Alexios tactfully decided not to investigate further, allowing his nephew to keep his office. Considering his role in the crisis caused by the accusations made against Ioannes Komnenos, Nikephoros Melissenos seems to have been a source of disturbance and accordingly, a disliked member of the imperial family.⁷⁰

Anna Komnene reports that when everybody was commemorating the victory over the Petchenegs in Levounion in 1091, Nikephoros Melissenos acted as a killjoy, remarking that the nomads were still a threat.⁷¹ After the controversy involving Ioannes Komnenos, Nikephoros Melissenos is mentioned briefly during the Cuman invasions.⁷² He is not present at the Synod of Blachernae in 1095 and his sons with Eudokia Komnene were unable to achieve high positions.⁷³ Peter Frankopan wonders whether Melissenos' wane has nothing to do with the crises which broke within the Komnenian establishment and whether Nikephoros Melissenos' name was the one erased from the list of participants in Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy.⁷⁴ Even if we leave such

⁶⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, iv; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 732f. On the new court hierarchy created by Alexios I, see Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, pp. 34–40; Stiernon, *Notes*, pp. 222–243. On Adrianos Komnenos, see Ch. 3, fn. 10.

⁶⁹ Frankopan defends that Melissenos' appointment as *kaisar*, as well as his marriage with Eudokia Komnene, could have happened after 1081. However, he clearly oversees the information given by the primary sources, such as Bryennios, who states that the marriage took place when Ioannes Komnenos, Eudokia's father, was alive (ἔτι τοῦ πατρὸς περιόντος), and Anna Komnene, who reports that Nikephoros Melissenos did not want to wage war against Alexios Komnenos because they are related (ἐπεὶ δὲ κατὰ τῆ μὲν σχέσει Θεοῦ νεύσει ἐξ ἀγγιστείας ὑμῖν προσφικείωμαι...), Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, viii, 2; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 6; Frankopan, *The Fall of Nicaea*, pp. 153–164, especially pp. 162–164. On Nikephoros Melissenos, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Nikephoros 115; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 240–245; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 80–84.

⁷⁰ Frankopan, *The Fall of Nicaea*, pp. 153–184.

⁷¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 8, iii, 1. See also Frankopan, *The Fall of Nicaea*, pp. 168f

⁷² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, ii, 6.

⁷³ Frankopan, *The Fall of Nicaea*, p. 173. An exception is Ioannes Komnenos, Melissenos' son, who was appointed *Parakoimomenos*, which is a very important and influential position, Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, pp. 175–176.

⁷⁴ Frankopan, *The Fall of Nicaea*, p. 172

conjectures aside, Peter Frankopan makes a good case, showing that Nikephoros Melissenos was a problematic and not well-liked member of the Komnenian consortium.

Although his participation in a conspiracy against the emperor is hard to demonstrate, it is clear that he plotted together with Adrianos Komnenos against the son of the *sebastokrator*, most likely in order to harm Isaakios Komnenos politically. It could have cost him his position. Isaakios Komnenos was the most important associate of Alexios, so he was able to use his elevated position to demand the removal of Melissenos from the decision-making circle around the emperor. Though this event could also have harmed Adrianos Komnenos' position in the Komnenian establishment, he was the emperor's brother and could not be ousted as easily as Melissenos. It is a likely explanation of Nikephoros Melissenos' absence and Adrianos Komnenos' presence at the Synod of Blachernae.⁷⁵

We have seen above that one form of understanding Leon of Chalcedon's long and stubborn resistance to the confiscation of ecclesiastical property by the emperor and the many concessions granted to this metropolitan by the latter is that Leon of Chalcedon had a very powerful backing. The grandchildren of Ioannes Doukas and his in-laws, such as Maria of Bulgaria and Georgios Palaiologos, supported Leon of Chalcedon's resistance, partly out of personal devotion and partly to hurt Anna Dalassene, who proposed the polemic measures to the emperor and chose Eustratios Garidas for the office of the patriarch of Constantinople.⁷⁶

At the beginning of the 1090s, the situation was in a deadlock. Alexios I Komnenos deposed Eustratios Garidas in 1084, but instead of reinstating Kosmas, which would be a humiliation, he appointed Nicholas Grammatikos. Nevertheless, Leon of Chalcedon resisted and Alexios was left without any option but to depose and exile him to Sozopolis in 1086. Alexios said that Leon could return if he accepted his deposition and became a monk, a proposal rejected by the metropolitan.⁷⁷ Then, after years of stern resistance by Leon of Chalcedon and unsuccessful compromises, the

⁷⁵ One possible explanation for his absence could be that, during the Synod, which took place during a campaign against the Cumans, Melissenos was still guarding Ankhialos (see Ch. 4, fn. 73). However, Anna Komnene mentions that Georgios Palaiologos and Ioannes Taronites were also assigned to this task, but both were present in the Synod. On Adrianos Komnenos, cf Ch. 3, fn. 10.

⁷⁶ See above Ch. 3.4.2 and 3.4.4.

⁷⁷ Grumel, *Les documents athonite*, p. 130.

whole Komnenian establishment assembled in Blachernae at the end of 1094 or the beginning of 1095 and solved that impasse that had dragged on for fourteen years.⁷⁸

This settlement concludes a convulsive period of internal crises within the Komnenian consortium. It began with the accusations against Ioannes Komnenos no earlier than 1092 and concluded with a final compromise between the emperor and Leon of Chalcedon's supporters, that is, his wife's family. Demonstrations of mistrust among brothers, and the betrayals of in-laws and former allies, weakened and endangered the existence of the establishment formed in 1081 with the coronation of Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina. Due to the clear risk of the consortium being destroyed from within, the Doukai, for the sake of a greater good, abandoned the support granted to Leon of Chalcedon, who, without his powerful patrons, had no other option than to conciliate with the emperor.⁷⁹

This compromise also had a price for Alexios Komnenos. Anna Dalassene, whose role as mediator and warrantor of the collaboration or non-aggression pact between the Komnenos brothers was highlighted above, saw her last political action shortly before the Synod of Blachernae. Anna Komnene attributes the decision of blinding the impostor who claimed to be a son of Romanos IV during the Cuman invasion in the winter of 1094/1095 – and therefore almost simultaneously to the Synod of Blachernae – to Eustathios Kymineianos and Anna Dalassene.⁸⁰ Afterwards, she is not mentioned anymore by Anna Komnene. Zonaras reports without any chronological reference that Anna Dalassene voluntarily retired to the Pantepoptes Monastery after noticing that her son resented her influence. She died in this monastery at an old age.⁸¹ The year of her death was established between 1100 and 1102.⁸² Hence, it is perfectly possible that her removal to Pantepoptes happened as an aftermath of the Synod of Blachernae. Alexios had to pay this price in order to reach a final compromise with his

⁷⁸ Alexios Komnenos mentions in his opening speech to the Synod that he was in the middle of a military campaign, but due the seriousness of the issue, he interrupted his military efforts to solve it. Paul Gautier states correctly that Alexios I was mentioning the campaign against the Cumans during the winter of 1094/1095. Therefore, Gautier dates this assembly at the latest at the beginning of 1095, *Acta cujusdam sinodi Constantinopoli*, p. 972–984; Gautier, *Le synode de Blachernes*, pp. 280–284; Grumel/ Darrouzès, *Regestes*, entry nr. 965.

⁷⁹ Gerhold, *Le mouvement calcédonien*, pp. 101–103.

⁸⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 10, ii–iv; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 744. On the dating of this invasion, see Gautier, *Le synode de Blachernes*, pp. 280–284.

⁸¹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 746.

⁸² On the dating of the Anna Dalassene's death, see Cheynet, *Les Dalassènoi*, p. 439; Kouroupou/Vannier, *Commémoraisons des Comnènes*, p. 51; Papachryssanthou, *La date*, pp. 250–255; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 22.

wife's family. Moreover, in 1095, Anna Dalassene's role was no longer as necessary as it had been in 1081.

At the beginning of his reign, Alexios was a usurper at the head of a small and precarious group governing a bankrupted state, unable to gather an army without financial measures at a high political cost. He, therefore, needed Anna Dalassene to help him govern and, most importantly, to warrant his brothers' cooperation. In 1095, Alexios was in a much better position and the role played by his mother had lost much of its reason to be. As a result, she became a nuisance for him, as Zonaras reports, due to the grudge between her and the emperor's in-laws, which was personified by the deadlock caused by Leon of Chalcedon's resistance to the confiscation of ecclesiastical property. Until then, Alexios was able to manage the situation by devising Solomonic solutions. However, the familiar crisis caused by the accusations against Ioannes Komnenos, the Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy, and the appearance of pretenders claiming to be Diogenai achieving certain recognition may have given Alexios I Komnenos the impression that his regime was falling apart. Hence, he decided to make a sacrifice in the name of union.

Much attention is given to the attendance list at the Synod of Blachernae but not much to the text transmitted in the records of the Synod.⁸³ It is indeed a very interesting document for many reasons. Firstly, when addressing the participants, Alexios makes it very clear that the whole affair was the result of personal grudges among the parties.⁸⁴ Secondly, Leon of Chalcedon, who had been very vocal during the whole crisis, almost disappears in the document. He was allowed to speak to the Synod, but his words were not registered in the *semeioma*.⁸⁵ In the end, Leon agreed to the compromise proposed

⁸³ Check fn. 78 above.

⁸⁴ Acta cujusdam sinodi Constantinopoli, p. 977: Καὶ δὴ πρὸ πάντων παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς ἀποθέσθαι θυμὸν, φθόνον, μῖσος παλαιὸν ἢ καὶ νέον, καὶ κακίαν ἅπασαν πόρρω ποιᾶτε ἀπελάσαι τῶν ψυχῶν ὑμῶν· καὶ μὴ ἐριστικῶς καὶ φιλονείκως, ἀλλὰ λογικῶς καὶ φιλανθρωπῶς, μὴ μετὰ προσωποληψίας καὶ τῆς ματαιᾶς οἰήσεως ἢ μετὰ τινος ἄλλου ἀνθρωπίνου θελήματος, ἀλλὰ μετὰ πάσης πραότητος καὶ ἰλαρότητος, καὶ γνώμης ἐλευθέρως καὶ ἀπαθοῦς, καὶ εἰρήνης καὶ ὁμονοίας ποιήσασθαι τοῦ πράγματος τὴν διάγνωσιν, τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φόβον πρὸ ὀφθαλμῶν ἔχοντας, καὶ αὐτὸν παρεστάναι ἐπώπιον ὑμῶν βλέποντας. **Ἀλλὰ μὴδὲ φιλίαν ἀνθρωπίνον τῆς ἀληθείας προτιμήσωμεν, μὴδὲ διὰ πάθος ἀνθρώπινον παρίδωμεν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἢ καλύψωμεν ἢ παραδράμωμεν.** (I stand here in front of all and encourage you to lay aside all thought of malice and hate, old and new, and to expel further away all evil from your souls and make the assessment of subjects not contentiously or captiously, but rationally and philanthropically, not with partisanship and vain notions or with some other human will, but with gentleness, joy and frank and dispassionate opinions, with peace and unanimity, having the fear of God before your eyes and seeing him present before us. **But we shall not prefer human friendships to the truth or despise the truth because of human passions, nor shall we hide it or omit it.**)

⁸⁵ Acta cujusdam sinodi Constantinopoli, p. 980.

by the emperor without raising objections.⁸⁶ Finally, the confiscation of church property, the source of all the problems, was not even mentioned. The document speaks of some ambiguities (*amphibolīa*) in Leon of Chalcedon's writing, but, at the end of the day, the compromise was a confirmation of the Orthodox dogma concerning the cult of images without any reference to confiscations.⁸⁷

Besides settling a theological dispute, the Synod of Blachernae in 1094/1095 recast the Komnenos-Doukas alliance. The tensions, which had hindered entire cooperation, were resolved by removing their sources. Anna Dalassene was sent to Pantepoptes and Doukas' backing for Leon of Chalcedon was put to an end so that a new hierarchy could be established. Isaakios Komnenos still occupied the semi-imperial role as the emperor's prime partner and collaborator. Now, however, Alexios I had under him his in-laws through his wife; her brothers, Ioannes Doukas and Michael Doukas, as well her brother-in-law, Georgios Palaiologos, and no longer his relatives by marriage through his sisters.⁸⁸ It is possible that once Anna Dalassene was removed, Eirene Doukaina was able to take control of the Women's Quarter at the Palace, which had been so far under Anna Dalassene's control, ending another source of disagreement between the emperor and the Doukai.

An interesting trend that became more pronounced in the later years of Alexios I's reign was the importance of the emperor's nephews and son-in-laws in the military and in politics. One member of the synod was Ioannes Taronites, the son of Michael Taronites, with the title *sebastos*, placed under Georgios Palaiologos.⁸⁹ Ioannes Taronites was sent to Trebizond to deal with his cousin Gregorios Taronites, who rebelled when sent to that city as its *doux*.⁹⁰ Although Gregorios was finally defeated by his cousin and arrested, he did not refrain from speaking ill about the emperor. He was only brought to reason by Nikephoros Bryennios, the emperor's son-in-law.⁹¹ Bryennios was married to Anna Komnene between 1095 and 1097. In that occasion, he received the title *panhypersebastos* and later *kaisar*.⁹² This title placed him above the

⁸⁶ Acta cujusdam sinodi Constantinopoli, p. 984.

⁸⁷ Acta cujusdam sinodi Constantinopoli, p. 972, 976.

⁸⁸ Gautier, Le synode des Blachernes, p. 217.

⁸⁹ On Ioannes Taronites, Adontz, Les Taronites en Arménie, p. 257; Gautier, Le synode des Blachernes, p. 236; Jeffreys et al, PBW, Ioannes 117; Nikolaros, Die Taronitai, pp. 247–249; Skoulatos, Les personnages, pp. 155f.

⁹⁰ Anna Komnene, Alexiad I, 12, vii, 2–4.

⁹¹ Anna Komnene, Alexiad I, 12, vii, 4.

⁹² Gautier, Introduction, in Nikephoros Bryennios, Hyle Historias, pp. 24–31; Skoulatos, Les personnages, pp. 229–233; Varzos, Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν, 1, 4, 176–197.

emperor's brother-in-law and below the emperor's older brother, Isaakios Komnenos. However, Isaakios died some years after this marriage and Alexios granted positions in the hierarchy to his younger sons and other sons-in-law. Andronikos, Alexios' second son, was made *sebastokrator*, Isaakios, his third son, was appointed *kaisar*, and Euphorbenos Katakalon, married to Maria, the second oldest daughter, became *protosebastos*.⁹³ This meant that Nikephoros Bryennios was placed in the second highest position in the Komnenian hierarchy, after the emperor's second son and on an equal footing with the emperor's third son. The position he enjoyed in Alexios I's last years reflected this status.⁹⁴

The marriage between Nikephoros Bryennios and Anna Komnene was only made possible because Anna Komnene's former fiancé, the Konstantinos Doukas, had died in August of 1094, shortly after the outbreak of the murder conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes in July.⁹⁵ This union was most likely a reward to the Bryennioi for their stance during the whole Pseudo-Diogenes crisis in 1094/1095.⁹⁶ During the Cuman invasion, Pseudo-Diogenes convinced his Cuman associates to camp in front of the walls of Adrianople so that he could call on Nikephoros Bryennios, senior, in order to be acknowledged by him as Romanos IV's son. It was a sound strategy. Nikephoros Bryennios was a close supporter of Romanos IV Diogenes and his adopted brother.⁹⁷ Moreover, Bryennios had already rebelled and been defeated by Alexios Komnenos during the reign of Michael VII and Nikephoros III. He had been blinded in consequence of that. Therefore, Pseudo-Diogenes possibly expected that Nikephoros Bryennios would have enjoyed the opportunity to take revenge against Alexios by acknowledging him as the alleged son of Romanos IV Diogenes, but he was

⁹³ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 749.

⁹⁴ Ioannes Zonaras reports that, as the emperor became increasingly ill, Nikephoros Bryennios took over the everyday administration of the Empire and was favored by the Empress Eirene. Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 754.

⁹⁵ Timing of Konstantinos' death shortly after a conspiracy took place in his residence with the involvement of his mother throws a shadow of suspicion of foul play. However, there is not enough evidence to make strong accusations against anyone concerning his murder. Moreover, as Anna Komnene already stated, Konstantinos was already ill one month before his death. On the day of Konstantinos Doukas' death, see Kouroupou/ Vannier, *Commémoraisons*, p. 67.

⁹⁶ As noticed, Konstantinos Doukas was alive in August 1094 during the Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy and Nikephoros Bryennios appears in the *Alexiad* already described as the emperor's son-in-law during a Crusader siege on Constantinople in 1097, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, ix, 6. See also Frankopan, *Unravelling the Alexiad*, pp. 156.

⁹⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, iii, 3.

disappointed, for Nikephoros Bryennios did not recognize him. Instead, he was lured inside of the fortress of Poutza, arrested and blinded.⁹⁸

Peter Frankopan sees in this decision a strong argument for accepting that the alleged son of Romanos IV was the person he claimed to be. According to Frankopan, the alleged Diogenes would only present himself to Nikephoros Bryennios to be acknowledged by him if he was sure that he would be identified as being the person he claimed to be. Moreover, the strong tie between Nikephoros Bryennios and Romanos IV would be something that only an insider would be informed about. These arguments are not very strong. An adoption – mainly one with strong political tinges – was surely a public and publicized event and the alleged Diogenes could have expected to be acknowledged by Bryennios for reasons of political expedience. If Bryennios were waiting for an opportunity to rise against Alexios I, he would have recognized the alleged Diogenes regardless of whether he was the emperor's son or not.⁹⁹

The marital union between the Bryennioi and the Komnenoi can therefore be seen as part of the recasting of the Komnenos-Doukai alliance. It was followed by other marriages, between emperor's daughters and members of Thracian houses, such as Maria Komnene with Nikephoros Euphorbenos Katakalon and Theodora Komnene with Konstantinos Kourtikes.¹⁰⁰

The attendance register also lists Humbertopoulos at the Synod of 1095 as one of the *sebastoi* and accordingly, positioned highly in the Komnenian hierarchy. Anna Komnene and Ioannes Zonaras report that Humbertopoulos and Ariebes, another military officer of Armenian origin, organized a plot against Alexios. Although this conspiracy must have caused a certain level of awkwardness for the emperor, since Humbertopoulos was one of his co-conspirators who supported his rebellion against Nikephoros Botaneiates and further participated in many of his military campaigns, neither Anna Komnene nor Zonaras give the impression that the conspiracy enjoyed a wide support.¹⁰¹ Because of the clear chronological connection established by Anna

⁹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 10, iii, 3 – iv, 5

⁹⁹ Frankopan, *Unravelling the Alexiad*, pp. 155f.

¹⁰⁰ On unions between Komnenoi and members of Thracian aristocracy, see Ch. 3, fn. 154.

¹⁰¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 8, vii, 1; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 741. On the political and military role of Humbertopoulos in the reign of Alexios I, see Birkenmeier, *The Development*, p. 83; Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 44f, 139; Hohlweg, *Beiträge*, p. 71; Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, p. 240; Gautier, *Le synode de Blachernes*, pp. 240; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Konstantinos 122; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Commène*, pp. 51,55, 110–113, 404–405; Shepard, 'Father' or 'scorpion?', p. 116; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 68–71. On Ariebes, Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Konstantinos 6001; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 28f.

Komnene between the victory in Levounion in April 1091 and the outbreak of this conspiracy it is generally assumed that it happened directly after the battle. Although he and Ariebes had their properties confiscated and were exiled, it is believed that at least Humbertopoulos was pardoned since he was present at the Synod of Blachernae and took part in the military efforts against the Cumans, both in 1095.¹⁰² Considering the chronological uncertainties in the narrative sequence of the *Alexiad*, Peter Frankopan considers it plausible that the Humbertopoulos conspiracy took place after the Cuman invasion of 1095. In spite of the clear connection established by Anna Komnene between the conspiracy of Humbertopoulos and the aftermath of the Battle of Levounion, there are convincing signs that could confirm Frankopan's proposal. After the Cuman invasion, Humbertopoulos disappears from the sources. Since Anna Komnene is always eager to report her father's merciful acts, the fact that she does not mention an imperial pardon for Humbertopoulos suggests that Alexios did not reinstate him. Moreover, in the list of properties assigned to the Monastery of Pantokrator, founded by Ioannes II Komnenos, there is a record of the "House of Humbertopoulos", which could mean that the rebel's confiscated property was never returned.¹⁰³

4.3 The Anemas Conspiracy

The second conspiracy, which Anna Komnene describes in detail, was the Anemas Conspiracy. Sometime around the year 1100, the brothers Michael, Leon, and two others, who Anna Komnene does not name, plotted to murder Alexios Komnenos.¹⁰⁴ The Anemas brothers managed to win the support of important members of the aristocracy, such as the Antiochoi¹⁰⁵, Konstantinos Exazenos Doukas¹⁰⁶, Nikephoros Exazenos Hyaleas¹⁰⁷, a certain Kourtikios¹⁰⁸, Niketas Kastamonites¹⁰⁹,

¹⁰² Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 124, p. 96; Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, p. 240; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 69f.

¹⁰³ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 124, p. 96; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. The Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes*, p. 264; Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, p. 217; Gautier, *Le typikon du Christ Sauveur Pantocrator*, p. 123.

¹⁰⁴ Ioannes Zonaras also reports this conspiracy, but the limited information he provides confirms what Anna Komnene reports, see Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, iv–vi; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 745; see also Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, pp. 89–97, 251–256, 287; Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 239–241; Leib, *Complots à Byzance*, pp. 256–274; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry 130, pp. 98f, also pp. 100f, 365–369; Gerhold, *Église et aristocratie laïque*, p. 58; Magdalino, *The Empire*, p. 203; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, pp. 119–122, 301–307; Skoulatos, *Les*, pp. 200–202.

¹⁰⁵ On the Antiochoi, Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 25–27; Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, pp. 250f, 257f.

¹⁰⁶ On Nikephoros Exazenos Hyaleas, see Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 65f.

¹⁰⁷ On Konstantinos Exazenos Doukas, see Polemis, *The Doukas*, p. 119; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 65f.

Georgios Basilakes¹¹⁰, Ioannes Solomon¹¹¹, a certain Skleros¹¹², and a certain Xeros¹¹³, who was a former eparch of Constantinople. According to Anna Komnene, Solomon was persuaded to participate in the plot by being promised that he would be acclaimed emperor, which, however, was a lie. The ringleaders coveted his resources, for he was exceedingly rich. However, he started to act like an emperor, pledging titles and offices in hope of gaining support. When the Anemades heard this, they felt constrained to accelerate their plans and decided to commit the murder in the palace. Before the conspirators could execute their plans, Alexios was informed. Accordingly, he ordered Georgios Basilakios and Ioannes Solomon to be brought to the Palace so that they could be interrogated. Solomon denied the accusations at first, but when the *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos threatened him with torture, he gave in and provided the names of the other participants. Solomon and others had their property confiscated and were exiled. Furthermore, the ringleaders and the Anemas brothers were publicly paraded in Constantinople and condemned to be blinded. The last punishment was not carried out thanks to the intervention of the empress Eirene and Anna Komnene. Michael Anemas was kept under arrest in a tower near the palace.

Cheyne links this plot with the officer's discontentment with Alexios' military policies, especially as far as Anatolia was concerned.¹¹⁴ Werner Seibt is of the opinion that the conspiracy was motivated by involved officers' dissatisfaction with the position given by Alexios to his relatives.¹¹⁵ Both hypotheses shall be assessed.

Cheyne supports his argument with the fact that most of those involved hailed from families of Anatolian origin, whose members participated in the rebellion that brought Isaakios Komnenos to power in 1057. However, if we compare the list of participants in the rebellion of Isaakios Komnenos with the conspiracy of Michael Anemas, it is noticeable that the only surnames in common are Antiochos, Doukas, and

¹⁰⁸ Skoulatos identifies this Kourtikios with Basileios Kourtikios, a military officer often mentioned by Anna Komnene in her father's campaigns. Since the rebel Kourtikios is simply called a "certain Kourtikios (Κουρτίκιός τις)" by Anna Komnene, this identification is questionable, Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 43–46.

¹⁰⁹ On Niketas Kastamonites, Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, p. 257; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 249f.

¹¹⁰ On Georgios Basilakes, Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, p. 256; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 93.

¹¹¹ On Ioannes Solomon, Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 154f.

¹¹² On Skleros, see Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 301. Gautier holds that it is possible that the named Skleros was Andronikos Skleros, listed in the Synod of Blachernes. Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, p. 245; Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, pp. 105f.

¹¹³ On Xeros, Cheynet, *Les Xèroi*, p. 20; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 301f;

¹¹⁴ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 367.

¹¹⁵ Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, p. 105

Skleros. This is not conclusive, since the only Doukas who participated in the Anemades' plot was most likely a member of a secondary branch of the family, acting independently of his relatives, who were allied with the emperor. The participation of the unnamed Skleros in the plot against Alexios does not support Cheynet's argument either, for, since the end of the 10th century, when the Skleroi were defeated in their rebellion against Basileios II, the family gradually lost its military *ethos*, and is found more often in the bureaucracy.¹¹⁶ In Alexios' time, this process seems to have reached completion, for the Skleros involved in Anemas plot seemed to be one of the senators brought to the conspiracy through the influence of Ioannes Solomon.¹¹⁷ Moreover, the presence of Georgios Basilakes, an issue from a Thracian family demonstrates that this plot was not purely Anatolian.

Although the list of participants in the conspiracy is not entirely conclusive as far as motives are concerned, Anna Komnene's introduction to her account of this plot may be. She begins her report with an incident in Constantinople. A statue of the god Apollo, which used to stand on the top of a column in the Forum of Constantine, fell down and this event set in motion all kinds of speculation about the future death of the emperor.¹¹⁸ Further on, she makes mysterious remarks about the menaces threatening Alexios I at that time, based on two main themes: firstly, Alexios is not only surrounded by internal and external enemies, especially Bohemond of Taranto, but they also seems to work together.¹¹⁹ Secondly, she defends her father's foreign policy, which was aimed

¹¹⁶ Seibt, *Die Skleroi*, passim.

¹¹⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 5.

¹¹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, iv, 5. The *Patria*, a collection of stories, mostly mythical, about the origins of the monuments in Constantinople, dates this episode in the year 1106. This can be explained by a mistake or an intentional inclusion made by Anna Komnene. She associates the ominous fall of the statue of Constantine with the beginning of the turbulent times she is about to describe, Berger, *Accounts of Medieval Constantinople. The Patria*, 1.45a. On imperial prophecies, Brandes, *Kaiserprophetien*, pp. 157–200; Magdalino, *The Political Ideology*, pp. 207–219.

¹¹⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 1: *τά τε γὰρ ἔνδον ἀποστασίας ἦσαν μεστὰ καὶ τὰ ἔξωθεν ἐπαναστάσεως ἔγεμε, καὶ μήπω πρὸς τὰ ἔνδον τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἀντικαταστάντος τάκτος πάντα περιεφλέγγαινε, βαρβάρους ἅμα καὶ τοὺς ἔνδον τυράννους τῆς τύχης αὐτῆς ὡσπερ τινὰς γίγαντας αὐτοφυεῖς ἀναβλαστανούσης* (Indeed, the internal affairs were full of rebellion and the external affair were full of insurrection. Although the emperor had not yet opposed the internal matters, all external matters were in flames, as if the fate herself had put forth at the same time barbarians and internal tyrants as a self-grown giant.); Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 3: *ἀλλ' ὅπερ ἔλεγον τοῦ λόγου ἀρχομένη, ὅτι θαυμάζειν ἔχω τὴν τοσαύτην τῶν πραγμάτων τῶν πολεμικῶν ἐπίχρσιν· τὰ τε γὰρ ἔξω καὶ τὰ ἔνδον πάντα ἦν ἰδεῖν κυμαινόμενα πανταχόθεν. ἀλλ' ὃ γε βασιλεὺς Ἀλέξιος καὶ τὰ ἀφανῆ τῶν ἐχθρῶν καὶ κρύφια καὶ προησθάνετό τε καὶ παντοδαποῖς μηχανήμασι πόρρω τὰς βλάβας ἀπήλαυνε, καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἔνδοθεν τυράννους καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἔξωθεν βαρβάρους ἀνταγωνιζόμενος ἀεὶ προφθάνων ὀξύτητι νοῦ τὰς τῶν ἐπιβουλεύοντων ἐπιβουλὰς καὶ ἀνακόπτων τὰς τούτων ὀρμάς. καὶ ἔγωγε στοχάζομαι ἀπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτῶν τὴν τύχην τῆς βασιλείας, ὅτι πανταχόθεν συνέρρευσε τὰ δεινὰ καὶ εἰτεράρακτο αὐτὸ τὸ σῶμα τῆς πολιτείας καὶ πᾶν ἀλλότριον ἐμεμήνει κατὰ τῆς βασιλείας Ῥωμαίων, ὡς εἴ τις οὕτως ἔχοι κακῶς, ὥστε καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀλλοδαπῶν πολεμεῖσθαι καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν οἰκείων κατατρυγέσθαι τὰς σάρκας*

at bringing peace and did not pressure foreign enemies. Even when Alexios had to wage war, peace was his major goal. If the enemies were at peace, they should be left in peace. According to Anna, it is senseless to act differently and seek war for its own sake. Such behaviour would lead to the destruction of the *politeia*.¹²⁰

Because of the reference to Bohemond of Taranto, who organized and led a Norman invasion in 1107 and 1108, this conspiracy was once dated as being contemporaneous to this invasion.¹²¹ This connection conflicts with the fact that Isaakios Komnenos had a role in the repression of this conspiracy. We know he died between the years 1102 and 1104, which indicates that the conspiracy took place before that, most likely around 1100.¹²² According to Michael the Syrian, Bohemond was defeated, captured by the Danishmend emir and brought to Sebasteia in 1101.¹²³ He was only freed in 1103. After heading to France, he began his preparation for the invasion of the Empire in 1107.¹²⁴ Consequently, at the time of the Anemas conspiracy, Bohemond seemed to be more engaged in fighting the Turks in Eastern Anatolia than in planning an invasion of the Empire. The Anemas plot could also have taken place while Bohemond was a prisoner of the Danishmend. Thus, either Anna Komnene was misinformed of the events or she forged a connection between the conspiracy and her father's archenemy. Maybe her use of Bohemond as a source of external danger against her father meant the Frankish aggression in general. It is already known that the

διαμασσώμενον, τοῦτον δὲ ἀνεγείραι τὴν πρόνοιαν, ἵνα πρὸς τὰ πανταχόθεν κακὰ ἀντιμηχανῶτο, ὥσπερ δὴ καὶ τὸ τηλικαῦτα συνιδεῖν ἔδει· ὃ τε γὰρ Βαϊμοῦντος ὁ βάρβαρος ὁ πολλάκις ἡμῖν εἰρημένος ἐξηρτύετο κατὰ τῶν σκήπτρων Ῥωμαίων βαρύτερον στράτευμα ἐπαγόμενος καὶ τὸ τυραννικὸν τοῦτου πληθὸς ἐτέρωθεν ἀντεπηγείρετο, καθάπερ ἄνωθεν τοῦ λόγου πεπροοιμίασαι (But what I said at the beginning of the chapter is that I could marvel with the influx of hostile actions. Indeed, it was possible to see all internal and external matters completely agitated. However, the emperor Alexios perceived the unseen and concealed actions of the enemies and put away the harm with many mechanisms, fighting the tyrants inside and the barbarians outside, always anticipating with sharpness of mind the schemes of the plotters and pushing back their assaults. I myself infer from the events themselves the destiny of the Empire, for terrible things flowed together and stirred the body politic itself, as well as enraged everything that was foreign against the Roman Empire, as if someone were in such bad situation, that he was battled by external factor and wore out by his internal, but, having his flesh pressed, was raised by the providence so that he contrive machinations against evil actions coming from all sides, even as he had to know the circumstance of that time. The barbarian Bohemund, mentioned many times by us, was getting ready against the Roman authority by leading the strongest army and this multitude of rebels from the other side was gathering together, as was said above at the beginning of the chapter).

¹²⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 12, v, 2: εἰρήνη μὲν γὰρ τέλος ἐστὶ πολέμου παντός, τὸ δ' ἀνθελέσθαι αἰεὶ αὐτόθεν τὸ ἐνεκά του καὶ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τέλους αἰεὶ ἀμελεῖν, τοῦτο ἀνοήτων ἐστὶ στρατηγῶν καὶ δημαγωγῶν καὶ ὄλεθρον πραγματευομένων τῆς πόλεως. (Indeed, the peace is the goal of every war, but always choosing it hastily on account of itself is to be always neglectful of the good goal, it is something of the senseless generals and demagogues who are engaged with the ruin of the city.)

¹²¹ Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 239–241.

¹²² Papachryssanthou, *La date*, pp. 250–255.

¹²³ Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle*, translation by J.-B. Chabot, p. 188; see also Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, p. 319; Frankopan, *The First Crusade*, p. 181.

¹²⁴ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI, XI, 12, pp. 70f.; Frankopan, *The First Crusade*, p. 185.

representation of Bohemond of Taranto by Anna Komnene is a literary construction that summarizes all the danger presented by the Crusades, hence his portrayal does not necessarily correspond the historical reality. Anna Komnene depicts him as assuming a much greater role than he actually had.¹²⁵ Therefore, when she blames him for planning aggressions against Byzantium, it is possible that he is actually being blamed for things that other Franks have done.

Indeed, the most important event in the external background between the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094 and that of the Anemades was the First Crusade (1095–1099). It had had a major impact on Byzantine foreign policy, forcing Alexios I to turn his attention to the East. However, contrary to the expectation of the Crusaders, the emperor only provided half-hearted support, refusing to accompany them. Alexios did not want to compromise himself with an initiative most likely to fail, ruining the diplomatic network he had built up since 1081, which allowed him to emphasize the defense of the Western provinces. Although this stance was possibly very sensible, Crusaders saw it as treachery and cowardice.¹²⁶

Less known, however, is how the First Crusade affected internal politics in Byzantium. Anna Komnene's report can be misleading, as it is often if proper precautions are not taken. Firstly, she wrote during the Second Crusade and her treatment of the First Crusade was strongly affected by it. She tries to justify every action taken by her father and to acquit him of any accusation of bad management or even of responsibility for the emergence of the Crusades.¹²⁷ Secondly, according to her narrative, Alexios Komnenos or the imperial agents, such as Tatikios, who was sent to escort the Crusader army to Antioch, were the only channel through which the Crusaders had contact with Byzantium. It seems plausible since traditionally the emperor was the responsible for foreign policy. The Latin sources corroborate it. Alexios Komnenos is the only Byzantine depicted in some depth and he is held responsible for every setback the Crusaders suffered within the Empire. However, Anna Komnene's remarks, which precede her account of the Anemas conspiracy, hint that the Crusades could have had some direct impact on Byzantine internal politics.

¹²⁵ Buckley, *The Alexiad*, pp. 208–214; Shepard, *When Greek meets Greek*, pp. 185–277.

¹²⁶ On the stances of the Crusaders towards Alexios I and the Byzantines, see Frankopan, *The First Crusade*, pp. 186–206; Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, pp. 51–60; Pahlitzsch, *Graeci und Suriani*, pp. 73–88.

¹²⁷ Magdalino, *The Byzantine Background to the First Crusade*, pp. 1–38; Stephenson, *Anna Comnene's Alexiad*, pp. 41–54.

Before tackling Anna's mysterious comments, it is interesting to mention the main external events chronologically close to the Anemas conspiracy. In 1097, Alexios I Komnenos failed to assist the Crusaders while they were besieged in Antioch¹²⁸ and, simultaneously, he dispatched Ioannes Doukas, his brother-in-law and *megadoux*, to a campaign in Anatolia, resulting in the reconquest of some cities located between Smyrna and Polybotos.¹²⁹ Three years later, in 1101, a new wave of Crusaders arrived and suffered a crushing defeat in the Taurus Mountains. This surely helped to denigrate the reputation of the Byzantines in general and of Alexios I in particular in the West.¹³⁰

The emperor's lack of commitment to the Crusades not only had a negative impact in the West but also within Byzantine society. It was remarked here elsewhere that the Byzantine aristocracy did not appear very interested in reconquering Anatolia probably because even after a successful recapture, the reconquered regions would still be insecure. The Turkish nomads who answered to no authority would create significant difficulties in all efforts of exploiting the Anatolian provinces economically, and neither the state nor the aristocracy had enough resources to solve this problem permanently. However, the Crusades may have presented an opportunity for some. Anna Komnene reports solely from the emperor's point of view. He feared that the Crusader's presence would be a threat to his claim over lands that belonged historically to the Byzantine state. It is hard to believe that this position was shared by Byzantine society as a whole.

Many could have seen the Crusaders as fellow Christians and valiant warriors, who would have helped the Byzantines to expel the Turkish invaders from Anatolia once and for all. Michael Attaleiates considered the Franks as potential allies. He was an admirer of Roussel de Bailleau, seeing in him a powerful asset for the Empire, who was nevertheless antagonized by the stupid actions of Michael VII.¹³¹ There were indeed opportunities for members of the aristocracy and Crusaders to intermingle. Crusader leaders were invited to the court in order to take an oath to the emperor and to organize their advance through Anatolia. If Anna Komnene is to be believed, the Crusader leaders could move freely in the Palace and some seemed to have stayed there for a long time.¹³² Moreover, the aforementioned account by Orderic Vitalis of Bohemond's return to France, escorted by *aliosque de Grecis seu Tracibus illustrium* who were disgruntled

¹²⁸ A general survey on the event, see Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, pp. 31–41.

¹²⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 11, v. For studies on the Alexian *Reconquista*, see Whittow, *How the East was lost*, pp. 55–69; Mullett, 1098 and *All That*, pp. 237–253; Dias, *La construcción*, p. 55–73.

¹³⁰ Frankopan, *The First Crusade*, p. 181; Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, pp. 51–75.

¹³¹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 206f.

¹³² Shepard, *When Greek meets Greek*. p. 210f.

with Alexios, is evidence that Byzantines and Franks could cooperate against the emperor's interests.¹³³

It is perfectly possible that during their stay in Constantinople, the Crusaders managed to win the support of some at court, convincing them that the Franks were viable as allies to retake lands lost to the Turks. Accordingly, the Byzantine supporters of the Crusaders were probably similarly disappointed with Alexios' ambiguous stance and his reluctance to support them as well as with the fact that he allowed them to be massacred at the hands of the Turks, as in 1101. Against such a background, Anna Komnene's mysterious statements, which hint at a cooperation between Alexios' inner and external enemies, her defense of her father's pacifism and her reference to Bohemond, her literary personification of all dangers represented by the Crusaders, make sense. It indicates that the conspirators were partially motivated by their pro-Crusader position and by their assessment that Alexios Komnenos was wasting a perfect opportunity to recover territory lost since 1071 and treating potential allies as enemies.

As in her introduction to the account of Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy, Anna Komnene refers to the conspirator's ingratitude by mentioning that Alexios I honored some with titles and others were showered with his rich gifts.¹³⁴ Anna Komnene defends her father's distribution policy, which was highly contested at the beginning of his reign. By the turn of the century, it became once again a source of problems. Some participants in the plot can be found with their respective titles on the attendance list of the Synod of Blachernae in 1095: *kouropalates* and *megales hetariarches* Konstantinos Antiochos, *proedros* and *primikerios* of the external *vestiarites* Michael Antiochos, *protoproedros* Georgios Basilakios and *protoproedros* Niketas Kastamonites. Furthermore, there are two Skleroi, *protonobelissimos* and *logothetes* of the *dromou* Michael and the *kouropalates* Andronikos, but they cannot be identified as the Skleros involved in the conspiracy with certainty.¹³⁵ They all held titles that once were accompanied by correspondent *rogai* or stipends and were the highest of the court hierarchy in the times before 1081. Alexios, however, not only established a princely hierarchy that superposed the former one, strongly devaluating the existing titles but also canceled the *rogai*. Therefore, it is no coincidence that some of the ringleaders of the Anemas conspiracy were holders of these ancient but devaluated titles. The loss of

¹³³ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI, XI, 12, p. 68f, translation by Marjorie Chibnall, p. 70f.

¹³⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 2.

¹³⁵ Gautier, *Le synode des Blachernes*, pp. 217f.

position was probably added to the list of dissatisfaction that encouraged some of those involved to conspire against Alexios. It is important to notice that, by this time, the separation of the elite in two groups – as it is observed later – was not yet complete, since we see high military officers with devaluated court titles.

A further detail is the involvement of Ioannes Solomon, head of the senators and previously listed among the pupils of Ioannes Italos.¹³⁶ In both accounts, Solomon is denigrated by Anna Komnene because of his low intellectual capabilities. As Italos' disciple, Solomon was unable to understand philosophical truths and, as a conspirator, he was incapable of maintaining the necessary secrecy, so that the other conspirators had to act too quickly and the intrigue failed. Anna Komnene reports that Ioannes Solomon, excited with the perspective of being appointed emperor, began to promise honors and offices to win support.¹³⁷ It is interesting that in order to gather support for his candidacy as emperor, Ioannes Solomon resorted to the policy of open generosity exchanging political support for titles and offices, the *modus operandi* that was fostered by 11th-century emperors, but was abandoned by Alexios after his seizure of power.

As other oppositional movements against Alexios I demonstrated, dissatisfaction with the new hierarchy brought many into the opposition. It also appeared to be the case with the participants of the Anemas conspiracy, as Seibt remarked. However, this was not the only decisive factor. When Anna Komnene associates this internal controversy with foreign aggressions, she hints that foreign policy exerted an important influence on the outbreak of this murder conspiracy. The last years of the 11th century in Byzantium were dominated by the Crusades and their consequences. Therefore, strong evidence has been presented that the ringleaders were possibly reacting against Alexios Komnenos' policies towards the Crusaders. Instead of the cautious stance defended by Alexios, Anna insinuates that the plotters defended an aggressive policy and a stronger cooperation with the Crusaders. Moreover, the involvement of senators like Ioannes Solomon, the leader of the Senate, Xeros, the former eparch, and most likely Skleros, as well as the actions of Solomon to gather support, indicate that the ringleaders made a concession to the political agency model of open generosity in order to win the support of the lower echelons of the aristocracy.

¹³⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 5, ix, 2.

¹³⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 6.

4.4 The Doukas after 1095

Although Peter Frankopan states that the influence of the imperial relatives, including the Doukai, faded away in the second half of Alexios' reign, he acknowledges that this apparent loss of importance might be due to the characteristics of the main source for political events in the period, Anna Komnene.¹³⁸ In fact, Anna Komnene provides less information on Alexios I's reign in general after the Crusades. From fifteen books in the *Alexiad*, ten are dedicated to events that happened between 1081 and 1096 and only five for the period between 1096 and 1118. Fifteen years are covered by ten books and eighteen years by five books. Therefore, the "disappearance" of Eirene's family members can be attributed more to the abridged character of the last books of the *Alexiad* than to some loss of political influence. Moreover, letters of Theophylaktos of Ohrid demonstrate that the empress' relatives continued to exercise influence in later times. In a letter to Ioannes Pantechnes, the secretary of Georgios Palaiologos, Theophylaktos reports that the emperor sent the *protostrator* Michael Doukas to Ohrid to draft soldiers against Bohemond of Taranto.¹³⁹ The reference to Bohemond's invasion clearly dates this missive to late 1107 or early 1108. It demonstrates that the *protostrator* Michael Doukas still had an important role in the military in the late years of Alexios I's rule.

The evidence concerning Georgios Palaiologos is more difficult to interpret. In the letter addressed to the secretary of Georgios Palaiologos, Theophylaktos requests Georgios Palaiologos' intervention in order to solve a fiscal problem concerning a village in the Vardar region.¹⁴⁰ Afterwards, the archbishop sent another missive expressing his gratitude to Georgios Palaiologos for solving his problem, which clearly demonstrates that not only was Palaiologos perceived as being influential, he also was in fact.¹⁴¹ The letters to Palaiologos do not refer to known episodes; hence, they are more difficult to date. However, in the first letter to Georgios Palaiologos' secretary, it is mentioned that Konstantinos, the son of the *protostrator* Michael Doukas, was responsible for the Vardar region. From another letter, we know that Konstantinos Doukas' appointment to this post happened almost at the same time as the one of

¹³⁸ Frankopan, *Kinship*, p. 13.

¹³⁹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 120, pp. 552f.

¹⁴⁰ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 88, pp. 461–463.

¹⁴¹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 126, pp. 598f.

Gregorios Kamateros to the post of *protoasekretis* and *nobelissimos*.¹⁴² This same Gregorios Kamateros appeared in the function of under-secretary (*hypogrammateus*) during the outbreak of Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy in 1094.¹⁴³ It is difficult to say definitely whether Kamateros' appointment as *protoasekretis* and *nobelissimos* took place directly after the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes, perhaps as a reward for his services. Yet considering that Michael Doukas was born in 1061¹⁴⁴ and that Alexios I would hardly give such an authoritative position to a little child, mid-1090s or 1094 is a possible date for Konstantinos Doukas' appointment as commander of the Vardar. Therefore, a *terminus post quem* of 1094 and *terminus ante quem* in 1118 for the letter to Palaiologos' secretary as proposed by Gautier is perfectly reasonable. It means that Georgios Palaiologos still had some influence in later times.

The case of Ioannes Doukas, Eirene Doukaina's other brother, is more complicated. He led a very successful campaign in western Anatolia in 1098¹⁴⁵ and afterwards, he is found still alive in the commemoration list of the Kecharitomene *typikon* as a monk with the name Antonios.¹⁴⁶ It is risky to assume automatically that he adopted the monastic garb as a result of his participation in conspiracies although this was often the case with rebels.

Here it is important to consider the political role of Eirene Doukaina. For almost the whole *Alexiad*, the empress played an insignificant role. Anna Komnene praises her for her beauty and her piety.¹⁴⁷ Eirene only took an active role at the end of Alexios I's reign as she began in 1105 to accompany him on military campaigns supposedly to relieve the pain caused by gout and to guard him against conspirators.¹⁴⁸ During the rest of his reign, we see a very active Eirene Doukaina trying to influence her husband in matters concerning the succession. It is a contradictory image. Until 1105, there was an apathetic Eirene Doukaina. After 1105, there was a fiery and determined Eirene Doukaina.

Leonora Neville states that the depiction of Eirene Doukaina actively trying to influence the succession was a literary construction by Ioannes Zonaras and Niketas

¹⁴² Gautier, Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae, nr. 127, pp. 570–579.

¹⁴³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, viii, 1: Γρηγόριος δὲ ἦν ὁ Καματηρὸς νεωστὶ προσληφθεὶς καὶ ὑπογραμματεῦον τῷ αὐτοκράτορι.

¹⁴⁴ Polemis, *The Doukai*, pp. 63–66.

¹⁴⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 11, v.

¹⁴⁶ Gautier, *Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôméné*, p. 125.

¹⁴⁷ On Eirene Doukaina's representation in *Alexiad* c.f. Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 119–124; Vilimonović, *Structure*, pp. 241–269.

¹⁴⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 12, iii, 1–8.

Choniates in order to slander Alexios I and Ioannes II as being emasculated by their women. As mentioned above, it is undeniable that both Zonaras and Choniates had strong disagreements with the Komnenian emperors and, as historians, it is perfectly possible that they have “colored” their reports to portray both emperors in a bad light. However, it is hardly credible that the whole episode is an invention. Behind these scandalous narratives, a kernel of historical truth must have existed. Otherwise, both historians could compromise their own credibility. Therefore, these accounts hint at the existence of dysfunctionality within the imperial family. One logical conclusion is that Eirene Doukaina lived in the shadow of Anna Dalassene until the removal of her mother-in-law. It must have been hard to compete with the grip that the “mother of all Komnenoi” had over her sons and the space that Alexios I allowed her to occupy in his government.¹⁴⁹

In the *typikon* of the Kecharitomene monastery founded by Eirene Doukaina, the empress could not avoid adding his mother-in-law on the commemoration list, but unlike all other included relatives, Anna Dalassene is not mentioned by her name, but as “my holy mistress and my majesty’s mother-in-law”¹⁵⁰. It is hard not to notice there a tinge of resentment by Eirene Doukaina towards Anna Dalassene. Probably, the support to Leon of Chalcedon’s resistance to the measures proposed by Anna Dalassene was an expression of this resentment and therefore the removal of the emperor’s mother was the fulfillment of a long-desired demand of Eirene Doukaina’s supporters.¹⁵¹ After being ignored for such a long period, it took time for Eirene Doukaina to enjoy real political influence. Alexios I’s ailment provided her with the ideal pretext to remain near him. As early as 1100, Anna Komnene reports that Eirene Doukaina intervened successfully with her husband to change Michael Anemas the fate of being blinded for his conspiracy.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Anna Komnene reports that Anna Dalassene controlled the Women’s Quarter of the Palace at the beginning of Alexios’ reign. According to Anna Komnene, her grandmother transformed it in a monastery, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, viii, 2. Moreover, in the speech to the emperor, Theophylaktos of Ohrid composes a panegyric to Anna Dalassene in which she is praised as a ruler. She is even compared to Salomon and David, Biblical kings and traditional imperial role models. Eirene Doukaina is meanwhile shortly mentioned as the mother of princes and princesses. It gives a clear image of the situation in court in 1088, Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 236–241 (for Anna Dalassene); p. 235 (for Eirene Doukaina).

¹⁵⁰ Gautier, *Le typikon de la Théotokos Kécharitôménè*, p. 125.

¹⁵¹ Barbara Hill does not believe that the removal of Anna Dalassene had anything to do with Eirene’s ambitions, Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, p. 53

¹⁵² See p. 163.

Overall, it is incorrect to speak of a loss of influence by the Doukai after 1096. If the empress' relatives "disappeared" from the *Alexiad*, the reason is that Anna Komnene's account of the events after 1096 is increasingly abridged and that the following years were not as eventful as the previous. The empress, as well as her brothers, brother-in-law and their sons, were still influential and held important positions. The compromise agreed during the Synod of Blachernae seemingly solved the existing conflicts and sources of disagreement between the families Komnenos and Doukas. Anna Dalassene was removed, giving Eirene Doukaina the opportunity of emerging from the shadows, partially occupying Anna Dalassene's position and becoming gradually more influential. In exchange, the Doukai withdrawn their backing for Leon of Chalcedon and provided the support Alexios needed for the rest of his reign, leading armies against foreign enemies and acting as mediators when people from outside the imperial circle had any request to the emperor. Besides, the political role of Eirene Doukaina must be rethought. Anna Komnene clearly held an ambiguous position concerning women in politics. This historian reserved a larger space for them than any other Byzantine historian before or after her, but at the same time, she was worried that this active female role would make her father, the true and only hero of her History, look bad. Her solution was to balance her representation of the imperial women between their real political importance and the *topoi* of piety, beauty, and modesty reserved for Byzantine women.¹⁵³ Eirene Doukaina was victim to this rhetorical ambiguity. She was not the submissive wife that Anna Komnene presented, but an ambitious woman who did not hesitate to protect both her position as empress and the interests of her family.

One clear example is the anecdote told by Niketas Choniates. The author reports that after Eirene Doukaina had long insisted on favoring Nikephoros Bryennios rather than Ioannes Komnenos for the succession, Alexios I would have lost his patience and scolded her about the absurdity of the proposal. The emperor began his argument by calling Eirene "my partner in bed and kingship".¹⁵⁴ Choniates wrote much later after the events, thus this speech was presumably an invention, but such a description gives us an idea of how the relationship between Alexios Komnenos and Eirene Doukaina was remembered and represented by an aristocrat from the late 12th and early 13th century who did not belong to the imperial circle: Eirene Doukaina was remembered as a equal to her husband.

¹⁵³ Hill, Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women, pp. 132–141.

¹⁵⁴ Niketas Choniates, *Chronike Diegesis*, John2, 5: κοινωνέ μοι λέχους και βασιλείας

4.5 A Summary of the Events between 1091 and 1100

The 1090s presented many challenges to the Komnenian establishment. The alliance forged in 1081 was full of contradictions and internal strife. Besides the external menaces faced by the emperor with little success in the first years of his reign, Alexios dealt with the consequences of the conflict of interests among his supporters, such as the Leon of Chalcedon controversy (1081–1095). Consequently, in the first ten years of his reign, Alexios I received half-hearted support from his family, particularly his in-laws through his wife, Eirene Doukaina, who did not entirely trust him. The reason was the effort to substitute Eirene for Maria of Alania and the position accorded to Anna Dalassene, who occupied the role that was supposed to be taken by Eirene. In spite of this and of the sequence of military failures he faced, Alexios I did not fall because the oppositional movements against him were unable to present a suitable alternative possibly because of the strong tendency to aristocratization in Byzantine politics and the importance of the purple birth as a source of legitimacy. Most of the possible candidates were either allied with Alexios I, such as the *porphyrogennetos* Konstantinos Doukas, Nikephoros Melissenos, and Isaakios Komnenos, or too young, such as the same Konstantinos Doukas and the brothers Leon and Nikephoros Diogenes, or disabled, such as the *senior* Nikephoros Bryennios, the leader of the Thracian elite. As a consequence, the dissenters had to turn to disgruntled members of the imperial family. Thus, we cannot trace a clear line between dissension and opposition in the first years of Alexios I's reign.

The situation changed with the victory in Levounion in 1091. The perspective of not only a long reign but also the establishment of a new dynasty changed the scenario. Consequently, the dissatisfaction of some groups inside and outside the Komnenian establishment was transformed into action. Two non-Komnenian *porphyrogennetoi*, Konstantinos Doukas and Nikephoros Diogenes, came of age and became possible leaderships for the opponents of Alexios Komnenos and his policies. If part of the dissension materialized in the form of dangerous conspiracies, some long-living sources of contentions inside the Komnenian establishment were quickly solved when it was noticed that the whole consortium was at risk. The result was the Synod of 1095, which recast and inaugurated the Komnenian regime again. Its premise was the resolution of all disagreements that hindered a full cooperation between Alexios I and Eirene Doukaina's family. Thus, marriage relatives through the emperor's sisters, to whom

privileged positions in the Komnenian regime had been given, which, however, did not result in support due in exchange, were removed and the Thracian aristocracy was included in the consortium, beginning with the grandson of the former rebel Nikephoros Bryennios.

Besides forcing Byzantium to recalibrate its foreign policy priorities, the arrival of the Crusaders created a debate about the reconquering of Anatolia. This question was seemingly not a major issue, nor a source of contention before that. Mark Whittow has already shown, in his comparison with the Iberian Reconquista, the Byzantine aristocracy's general lack of interest in reconquering their lost lands in Anatolia, and that Byzantine military actions and their relative success in the 12th century in that region were mainly imperial initiatives.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the importance of retaking lost lands in Anatolia and Alexios I's inaction in this matter as a source of contention between the emperor and part of the elite has been overestimated by the scholarship. However, it still existed, and there are indications that the arrival of the Crusaders increased pressure on the emperor to retake Anatolian land strongly. Anna Komnene hints discreetly, but clearly that the Anemas conspiracy can be associated with the influence exercised by the arrival of the crusaders and the changes it caused in Byzantine foreign policy. The internal opposition forced the emperor toward a more aggressive stance toward the Turks and a stronger cooperation with the Franks. Alexios' dubious stance towards the Crusaders and his half-hearted support resulted in worsening the relations between the emperor and the supporters of an offensive position in Anatolia. The organization of the murder conspiracy led by the Anemas brothers and supported by military officers such as the Antiochoi, Exazenoï, Kastamonites and Basilakes was the result. Quite certainly, the demotion of these officers to a second-class aristocracy and the long-existing tensions between Alexios and part of the Constantinopolitan elite were also important elements. Nevertheless, according to Anna Komnene, dissatisfaction with the emperor's war policy in Anatolia and his stance towards the Crusades seem to have been the decisive factors that transformed diffusive discontents into a conspiracy to dethrone the emperor.

Although the First Crusade forced Alexios I to face challenges not only externally but also internally, with the Anemas conspiracy, the reorganization of the Komnenian establishment in 1096 allowed Alexios I to reign for another twenty-two

¹⁵⁵ Whittow, *How the East was Lost*, pp. 55–69.

years in relative stability. In the second half of his reign, the emperor still had to face opposition in Constantinople and in the provinces, but none of these new oppositional movements posed the same threat to Alexios and his regime as the crises of the 1090s.

5. 1100–1118: The Stabilization of the Regime and Uprisings in the Provinces

Political opposition in the provinces during Alexios' reign is not as well documented as it is for the capital, so that it is more difficult to trace and to study it.¹ Nevertheless, from the few known examples, it is noticeable that provincial rebellions were not solely localized outbursts with local aims; some of them were also connected with the politics of the capital. Conspiracies such as that of Diogenes in 1094 and Aaron in 1107, which took place geographically in the provinces, are not considered here as expression of provincial opposition. They took place during military campaigns in which the emperor and a significant part of the court were present. At the Aaron and Diogenes conspiracy, the empress herself was present. Therefore, these events were clear extensions of Constantinopolitan court politics, and they cannot be ascribed to provincial society.² The following chapter will examine the Aaron conspiracy, the last known attempt to assassinate Alexios I, and provincial expressions of opposition, assessing them in the overall framework of the political struggles during this emperor's reign.

5.1 Crete and Cyprus

The rebellions in Crete and Cyprus have attracted a fair amount of scholarly attention.³ Nevertheless, many questions concerning their causes, the participants or even the chronology are still debatable. Reference to the rebellions in Crete and Cyprus in the speech to the emperor by Ioannes Oxeites, from early 1091, establishes an unquestionable *terminus ante quem* for their outbreak.⁴ However, the date of the repression of those rebellions is still a matter for discussion. The year 1092 was

¹ On rebellion in the provinces, see Haldon, *Social Elites*, pp. 190f; Hoffmann, *Rudimenten*, passim; Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, pp. 150–159; Lilie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 48–51; Neville, *Authority*, pp. 44–45, 136–164;

² On the imperial tent as a wandering court, see Malamut, *La tente impériale à Byzance*, pp. 65–88.

³ On the rebellions in Crete and Cyprus, see Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 186–89; Asdracha, *Η Κύπρος υπό τους Κομνηνούς*, pp. 307–311; Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 148–149; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 409–411; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Revolts on Crete and Cyprus*, pp. 382–402; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. The Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes*, pp. 264f; Gautier, *Défection et Soumission*, pp. 215–227; Hill, *A History of Cyprus I*, pp. 297–299; Mamankakis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας*, pp. 84f; Savvides, *Can We Refer?*, pp. 122–134.

⁴ Gautier, *Diatribes*, p. 35. 3–6: Ἐάλω, φεῦ, Χίος · ἀνήρπαστο Μιτυλήνη · ἀφίστατο Κύπρος, Κρήτη, τῶν νήσων αἱ κεφαλαί · τῆς Ἑσπέρας < μὲν > τὸ πλέον ἀγέλαι Σκυθῶν ἐβόσκοντο · τῆς Ἀνατολῆς δὲ οὐδὲ βραχὺ λείψανον ὑπελέλειπτο (Alas! Chios was taken. Mitylene was ravaged; Cyprus and Crete, the most important islands, rebelled; in the one hand the herds of the Scythians grazed most of the West, at the other hand a not small remnant of the East was left remaining).

considered the most probable date for the end of these uprisings.⁵ Peter Frankopan, however, questions this dating based on Anna Komnene's statement, according to which before being sent as *mega doux* to repress the revolts in Crete and Cyprus, Ioannes Doukas lived in Dyrrachium for eleven years. Hence, Frankopan establishes a *terminus post quem* for the repression in 1094.⁶ As mentioned above, Anna Komnene does not say that Ioannes Doukas spent eleven years in Dyrrachium as its *doux*. It is likely that he was sent there and placed under Georgios Palaiologos' command and then later appointed *doux*. Therefore, the second half of 1092, as determined by Gautier and substantiated with a good amount of evidence, seems to be the correct dating or, at least, a convincing *terminus post quem* for the repression of the rebellions in Cyprus and Crete.⁷

Similarly diverse are the reasons given for the outbreak of the rebellions. Jean-Claude Cheynet and Aikaterini Asdracha attribute the uprisings to the increasing fiscal pressure on provinces such as Crete and Cyprus, which did not suffer foreign invasions, and to the fear that these islands would be targeted by Tzachas, the Turkish emir who had been assailing the Aegean coast.⁸ Peter Frankopan and Alexis Savvides agree with Cheynet's fiscal explanation. Savvides and Asdracha add furthermore that in addition to the pressure exerted by the tax collectors, there were some claims for political autonomy by the local aristocracy.⁹

The two biggest Aegean islands were indeed hot spots for rebellious activities. In addition to the aforementioned uprising, there were others in Cyprus and Crete, which were connected with fiscal pressure. In 1042, Theophilos Erotikos convinced the Cypriots to kill the *praiktor* Theophylaktos because of the supposedly illegal high taxes he demanded from its inhabitants. Later, during the reign of one of the Doukas, Michael Psellos praised a curator in a letter for having appeased disgruntled inhabitants in Cyprus. The function of the addressee of the letter makes it clear that the source of

⁵ Gautier establishes a *terminus ante quem* 1091 for the beginning of the uprisings and 1092 for their end. Alexis Savvides contends that both rebellions began and ended in 1092, for they could not have lasted for such a long period. However, Savvides seems to ignore the testimony given by Ioannes Oxeites, which is unquestionably from early 1091, see Gautier, *Défection et Soumission*, pp. 215–227; Savvides, *Can We Refer?* pp. 122–134.

⁶ Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Revolts on Crete and Cyprus*, p. 387.

⁷ Gautier, *Défection et Soumission*, p. 227.

⁸ Asdracha, *Η Κύπρος υπό τους Κομνηνούς*, p. 309f; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 409f.

⁹ Asdracha, *Η Κύπρος υπό τους Κομνηνούς*, pp. 307–311; Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Revolts on Crete and Cyprus*, p. 384f.; Savvides, *Can We Refer?*, p. 128.

dissatisfaction was fiscal.¹⁰ At the end of Alexios I's reign or at the beginning of Ioannes II's, there was another uprising in Cyprus, which resulted in the death of its *doux*. Its motivation is unknown.¹¹ Moreover, in his justification for leaving his seat as bishop of Cyprus, Nicholas Mouzalon accuses Eumathios Philokales, the *doux* of the island, and Kalliparios, its *krites*, of oppressing the island's inhabitants with high taxes.¹²

Considering this background, the hypothesis that fiscal pressure represented an important element for the outbreak of the uprising in Crete and Cyprus before 1091 is convincing. Yet such pressure was not a new factor, for it had provided a constant source of discontentment since the mid-11th century. In order to transform immanent tension into a rebellion, a favorable occasion and a leading figure were required. Often leading figures exploited disgruntlement for their own ambitions, as in the case of Theophilos Erotikos. Is it possible to interpret the simultaneous uprisings in Crete and Cyprus similarly? Were they somehow connected with court politics in Constantinople?

The leaders of the uprisings in Crete and Cyprus, Karykes and Rapsomates respectively, are shadowy figures. Nothing is known individually about them and very little about their families. Therefore, not much can be said about their possible motivation or ambition. However, there is one personage related to these islands, Crete at least, whose ambitions are known and who may have been withheld from reports about the uprisings: Nikephoros Diogenes. Alexios I ceded him the island of Crete not only to rule it but also as his "own dwelling-place". No direct report demonstrates that Nikephoros Diogenes indeed dwelt in Crete, but his disappearance from the sources between the battle of Dristra in 1087 and his conspiracy in 1094 may indicate that he spent some time there, maybe as a consequence of his first murder plot against Alexios, executed by an assassin of Turkish-Armenian origins.¹³ It is important to observe that neither Karykes is described as being the governor or *doux* of Crete, nor Rapsomates held a correspondent position in Cyprus. Moreover, Anna Komnene reports that after the uprising in Cyprus was repressed, the aforementioned Eumathios Philokales was

¹⁰ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 410; Hill, *A History of Cyprus I*, pp. 296f.

¹¹ Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, XI, 28 pp. 129–133, translation by Marjorie Chibnall, p. 70f. Cheynet dates this revolt as having taken place in 1128, but Orderic Vitalis mentions a series of events that happened between 1117 and 1118, such as the death of Baldwin I, the king of Jerusalem and the death of Alexios I, Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 136, p. 104.

¹² Karlin-Hayter, *Alexios Komnenos. 'Not in the Strict Sense of Word an Emperor'*, pp. 142f.

¹³ See Ch. 4.1.1.

appointed as *stratopedarches* and its protector, but she does not mention whether a new governor was appointed for Crete.¹⁴

Anna Komnene's silence informs us that Alexios Komnenos preferred not to change the governor of Crete, whoever he was; and Nikephoros Diogenes is the last known person to have held this office. This action – or rather inaction – by the emperor is similar to the excessive tolerance he showed in face of Diogenes' constant plotting. Therefore, the following interpretation of the given information is proposed: Nikephoros Diogenes was appointed *doux* of Crete but was not sent there directly, for the emperor considered it wise to keep a close eye on Diogenes. At some point after 1087, Nikephoros was finally dispatched to Crete, probably in consequence of his first murder attempt. In Crete, he took advantage of the existent local dissatisfaction with the imperial government, fostering rebellion through his deputy, Karykes. Alexios became aware of the extent of his error and brought Nikephoros back at some point before 1092. If Nikephoros Diogenes was responsible for the outbreak of rebellion in Crete, it seems that he retained his office in the aftermath.

Now it is time to consider whether the uprisings in Crete and Cyprus were correlated with one another. Frankopan does not believe so since no source on the events provides enough evidence to justify such a statement.¹⁵ For most of the reports, he is correct, but there is a curious detail in Anna's account of the revolt in Cyprus. After her narrative on the event is over, she mentions, almost as a footnote, that the *tagma* of the Immortals (*Athanatoi*) participated in the rebellion.¹⁶ Although Anna Komnene mentions the soldiers who supported Rapsomates several times, she consciously avoided naming the Immortals. The Immortals were created by Nikephoritzes during the reign of Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078) as a part of his contested reforms. Later, they were found together with another rebel, Konstantios Doukas, during the reign of Nikephoros III (1078–1081). The Immortals supported his imperial claim, but they were also co-opted by the emperor. At the end, they handed over the rebel to him.¹⁷

¹⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, ii, 4.

¹⁵ Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in Byzantium in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. Revolts on Crete and Cyprus*, p. 384.

¹⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, ii, 4.

¹⁷ On the unit of the Immortals (*Athanatoi*), see Ch. 1, fn. 121 and Ch. 2, fn. 28. Asdracha describes the Immortal as sort of provincial unit whose head is the *doux*, Asdracha, *Η Κύπρος υπό τους Κομνηνούς*, p. 310.

The Immortals behaved similarly during the uprising in Cyprus. In face of the imperial troops, instead of engaging the enemies in combat, the Immortals and Rapsomates' other soldiers surrendered to the imperial troops, and Rapsomates was eventually arrested.¹⁸ Their establishment during the reign of Michael VII and their support of Konstantios Doukas signalizes that the Immortals had some political connection with the Doukai. Is it, therefore, possible to interpret their participation in the rebellion in Cyprus as a reaction to the likely ousting of Konstantinos Doukas as co-emperor? Although it only happened in 1092, the removal of Konstantinos Doukas had been expected since the birth of Ioannes Komnenos in 1087.

The evidence for that association is far from conclusive, but it coheres with the cooperation between the *porphyrogennetoi* Nikephoros Diogenes and Konstantinos Doukas during the Diogenes conspiracy in 1094. As a result, the involvement of the Immortals in the rebellion in Cyprus can be understood as a reaction to the developments within the Komnenian consortium caused by the birth of the first male *porphyrogennetos* in 1087. It might have been an independent reaction to the likely demotion of Konstantinos Doukas by a unit strongly loyal to Michael VII and so to his son. The fact that Ioannes Doukas was sent to repress this rebellion points to a link with the Doukai. Like on the occasion of the Nikephoros Diogenes conspiracy, when Adrianos Komnenos was sent to negotiate, and the rebellion of Gregorios Taronites in 1107, when Ioannes Taronites was sent to settle an agreement with the rebel, who was his cousin, Alexios I sent a Doukas in order to negotiate with a unit loyal to the Doukai. Although we have observed that the two branches of this family (Konstantinos Doukas' and Eirene Doukaina's) often pursued different and even contradictory interests, this strategy seemed to work. The rebellious troops refused to fight the imperial forces.

Anna Komnene's account is by far the most important concerning these rebellions, but it presents more questions than answers. She portrays the uprisings in Crete and Cyprus as purely provincial disturbances led by unimpressive figures, dealt swiftly by her father's wisdom and her uncles' military skills. However, the information provided by other sources casts doubts on Anna's portrayal. Why does she report the rebellions as being short when there are strong signs that they lasted at least two years? Why does she not mention who were their governors during the rebellion and who was appointed as the governor of Crete after the end of the uprising? Why does Anna

¹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, ii.

Komnene only mention the participation of the Immortals at the end of her account, almost as if she was trying to hide it?

It is clear that Anna Komnene, as in other episodes in her work, used her skill in writing to transform an embarrassing moment in her father's reign into something more laudable, for there is evidence that these events were indeed more than just isolated provincial rebellions and that the internal instability within the Komnenian consortium before 1095 could have been more serious and extensive than she was ready to acknowledge. It went beyond the court, expanding into the very important provinces of Crete and Cyprus. Despite the internal and external problems, Anna Komnene creates in *Alexiad* an image of her father as an emperor who has everything under control, almost an omniscient ruler, and as a master of the art of politics in attaching his family to the imperial power. To describe these rebellions as a failure of the emperor's family politics and to record the error made in sending a constant plotter such as Nikephoros Diogenes to a sensitive province such as Crete, would not have been appropriate to the portrayal Anna Komnene was trying to build. Faithful to her mission, she worked on the material available to her. By setting some events in a favorable light and remaining silent about others, she successfully turned her father's failure into a triumph.

5.2 Trebizond

Trebizond became a center of resistance center to the policies implemented by Alexios I, but rebellion only erupted in 1103 through the actions of Gregorios Taronites. The short report about his rebellion in the *Alexiad* is the only one we have.¹⁹ It presents interesting elements concerning the internal workings of the family government established by Alexios I Komnenos in 1081 and the existence of autonomous tendencies in the Pontos region, which eventually led to the emergence of an independent polity from Constantinople.

Between September 1103 and September 1104, Alexios I summoned Gregorios Taronites to Trebizond as *doux* of Chaldia to substitute Dabatenos. Gregorios was the nephew of Maria Komnene, Alexios's sister, and Michael Taronites, Nikephoros Diogenes' co-conspirator. When Taronites reached this region, he began a rebellion. He

¹⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 12, vii, 1–4. Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1222. On the rebellion and the rebel, see Adontz, *L'archevêque Théophylacte et le Taronite*, p. 586f; Bryer, *A Byzantine Family. The Gabrades*, pp. 165–176; Chalandon, *Essai*, p. 241; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 131, p. 101, as well as 221, 405; Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 188; Nikolaros, *Die Taronitai*, pp. 251–264; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 116–118; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 21, pp. 129–131.

arrested some members of the local Trapezuntine elite in Tebena together with Dabatenos and sent the emperor a long letter disparaging him, his relatives, the senators and army officials.

In the following year, Alexios I sent his nephew Ioannes Taronites, the son of Michael Taronites and Maria Komnene, and Gregorios' cousin, to deal with him. Alexios' instructions were to convince Gregorios to give up his rebellion and if he refused, to attack him with all possible resources. When Gregorios was informed of his cousin's arrival, he left Tebena, where he was staying, and went to Coloneia, a better stronghold. From there, Gregorios Taronites contacted the Danishmend Emir, asking him for support. Gregorios Taronites was eventually defeated and brought to Constantinople. Despite being responsible for Gregorios Taronites' defeat, his cousin, Ioannes Taronites, begged the emperor to pardon Gregorios so that he would not be blinded. Alexios' consent was given in a very interesting and symbolic form. Gregorios Taronites, however, faced public humiliation. His hair and beard were shaved and he was paraded in the streets of Constantinople. Afterwards, he was arrested for many years.

A comparison with another source dealing with Gregorios Taronites' actions in the region of Pontos, the four letters by Theophylaktos of Ohrid to a Gregorios Taronites, reveals problems with this account.²⁰ In these missives, the clergyman eulogizes him for his military deeds in Pontos. According to him, Taronites subjugated the Danishmend emir to his knees and conquered the Frank. Moreover, Theophylaktos praises Taronites for his role in the ransoming of this said Frank, who was captured by the Turks.²¹

The Frank mentioned by Theophylaktos is widely associated with Bohemond of Taranto, who was captured in 1101 and released at the beginning of 1103.²² These accounts apparently contradict the account given by Anna Komnene in two points: firstly, the appointment of Gregorios Taronites as *doux* of Pontos seems to be earlier than she affirms. Secondly, Anna Komnene's account of rebellious actions by Gregorios Taronites and of his disgraceful return to Constantinople do not match the account given by Theophylaktos, who praises his heroic deeds and his triumphal return to the capital. Some hypotheses have been formed to untangle these contradictions, among others that

²⁰ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, 65, pp. 362f; 78, pp. 414–417; 81, pp. 426–433; 92, pp. 472–475.

²¹ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, 81, pp. 426–433.

²² Adontz, *L'archevêque Théophylacte et le Taronite*, pp. 289–291.

Anna Komnene was mistaken and the rebel in question was not Gregorios Taronites, but Gregorios Gabras. Georgina Buckler aired this hypothesis, which later was supported by other scholars, among them Anthony Bryer and Nicholas Adontz.²³

Gregorios Gabras was the son of Theodoros Gabras, the successful leader of a local Pontic resistance against the Turkish invasions after the defeat in Manzikert in 1071. Theodoros was a former middle-rank officer and the issue of an aristocratic family with a long presence in the region. He organized the local resistance and was able to retake Trebizond from the Turks. Because of that independent effort, Theodoros Gabras did not want to submit his local authority to the emperor in Constantinople and at the same time, the emperor was unable to enforce his authority over Theodoros. Therefore, after Alexios I's seizure of power in 1081, both Theodoros Gabras and Alexios I recognized each other. Gabras acknowledged Alexios as emperor and Alexios confirmed Gabras' local authority.²⁴ Yet Alexios demanded that his son Gregorios Gabras should stay in Constantinople in order to marry one of the daughters of the *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos. When Theodoros Gabras, who was a widower, decided to marry a relative of Isaakios' wife in a translucent effort to create a canonical barrier to this engagement, Alexios Komnenos decided to marry Gregorios Gabras to one of his daughters, Maria Komnene.²⁵ The next move on the part of the Gabras family was to try to bring Gregorios back to Trebizond secretly, first by a scheme organized by Theodoros and, later, by Gregorios Gabras himself. Both failed and after the last attempt, Gregorios Gabras was exiled to Philippopolis, where its *doux* Georgios Mesopotames kept him under arrest.²⁶ Alexios Komnenos lost his patience after this last move and decided to break the deal he had with the Gabrades, for Zonaras reports that the emperor decided to end the engagement and marry Maria Komnene to Euphorbenos Katakalon. Zonaras does not indicate the motives; he says that the emperor did so

²³ On the confusion Gregorios Gabras/Gregorios Taronites, see Adontz, *L'archevêque Théophylacte et le Taronite*, pp. 285–296; Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, p. 340; Bryer, *A Byzantine Family. The Gabrades*, p. 176; Cahen, *La Turquie Pré-Ottomane*, p. 170; Mullett, *The Madness of Genre*, p. 242; Nikolaros, *Die Taronitai*, pp. 252–260.

²⁴ On Theodoros Gabras, Ch. 3 fn. 7.

²⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 8, ix, 1–6.

²⁶ *Alexiad*, 8, ix, 6–7. These two episodes are hard to date because Anna Komnene does not provide any chronological reference. This episode and the efforts by Theodoros Gabras to reclaim his son and resist the marriage proposals by the emperor are embedded between two episodes that can be surely dated to 1091 (the battle of Levounion and the claim for the imperial title by Tzachas). However, Anna Komnene's chronological uncertainties hinder any conclusion. The *terminus ante quem* can only be established in the year of Theodoros Gabras' death (1098). For the date of his death, see Skoulatos, *Les Personnages*, p. 296.

because he wanted to, although one can attribute these decisions to the staunch resistance presented by both Gabras.²⁷

The suggestion that Anna Komnene confused Gregorios Gabras with Gregorios Taronites is therefore rather unlikely. As Margaret Mullett pointed out, Anna Komnene's husband was a close friend of Gregorios Taronites, so she must have had some acquaintance with him. Thus, she would hardly falsely attribute a rebellion against her father to him.²⁸ The second reason – and even more importantly – is that this hypothesis has no political logic; why would Alexios I try so hard to prevent Gregorios Gabras' return to Trebizond, exile him in a distant Western province, cancel his engagement to his daughter and after all that appoint him as *doux* of Trebizond? The solution proposed by Paul Gautier and Mullett is more acceptable: Gregorios Taronites was firstly sent to the Pontos with a minor military function. There he achieved some military victories and possibly contributed to the negotiations concerning the liberation of Bohemond of Taranto. Afterwards, his deeds were rhetorically exaggerated by Theophylaktos. Satisfied with his results, Alexios sent Gregorios Taronites back to Trebizond, but then as a *doux*.²⁹

In a recent article, Stratos Nikolaros puts forward a strong argument to deny the possibility that Gregorios Taronites and Gregorios Gabras were the same person. He responded the hypothesis proposed by Margaret Mullett that Gregorios Taronites could have been a Taronites from his mother side, not from his father's side, who was presumably in this case a Gabras, making him Gregorios Gabras-Taronites. Nikolaros states that this is implausible because it makes no sense that Anna Komnene calls him Gregorios Gabras and, later in the text, Gregorios Taronites. More importantly, Anna Komnene clearly states that Gregorios was related to Ioannes Taronites “from his father side (*patrōthen*)”.³⁰

At some point between the death of Theodoros Gabras in 1098 and the appointment of Gregorios Taronites, Dabatenos was named the *doux* of Trebizond. This Dabatenos was previously mentioned by Anna Komnene as being one of the *topoteretes* and *toparchai* of the East summoned by Alexios to reinforce his troops in his efforts against the Normans just after he took power. His dominion was, according to Anna

²⁷ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 739.

²⁸ Mullett, *The Madness of Genre*, p. 242.

²⁹ Gautier, Introduction in Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, p. 122, fn. 11; Mullett, *The Madness of Genre*, p. 242.

³⁰ Nikolaros, *Die Taronitai*, pp. 252–260.

Komnene, Heraclea Pontica and Paphlagonia.³¹ Consequently, Alexios most likely chose him because of his political decision to return to Constantinople instead of staying as a local independent leader, as the Gabrades had. This meant that it was safe to send him as the governor of a region with such strong autonomous tendencies as the Pontos.

His presence in Trebizond as the imperial representative was made possible by two factors. Firstly, Alexios I was able to neutralize the leadership of the family Gabras in the region temporarily after the death of Theodoros Gabras in 1098, and the exile of his son Gregorios Gabras. Secondly, the arrest of members of the Trapezuntine elite in Tebena indicates the existence of an imperial party in Trebizond, which enabled Dabatenos to act as Constantinople's representative for a while, until he was replaced by Gregorios Taronites. When Alexios decided to substitute Dabatenos for Gregorios Taronites, he obviously planned to send someone faithful to him but also connected with the region, so that the local elite would accept imperial authority more easily. The Taronitai were originally from Taron, a city close to Pontos. Since the 10th century, its members had held very important military offices in Byzantium. Before the death of Alexios's father Ioannes Komnenos in 1067, he married his daughter Maria Komnene to Michael Taronites. Moreover, because of their Pontic origins, the Taronitai were also connected with the Gabras.³²

Gregorios Taronites did not fulfill imperial expectations. His insubordination can possibly be attributed to several causes. In 1103, the relationship between the Taronitai and Alexios I was tense due to the involvement of Michael Taronites in the murder conspiracy against Alexios led by Nikephoros Diogenes nine years before. On this occasion, Michael Taronites was exiled and his properties confiscated. After this failed coup, one might imagine that the Taronitai fell into disfavor. A reflex of this situation can be found in one of the letters to Gregorios Taronites by Theophylaktos of Ohrid, in which the archbishop states very strongly that the emperor was going to recognize Gregorios' merits and reward him.³³ Was it a response to Gregorios' insecurity expressed in a letter sent to Theophylaktos? We cannot be sure, but the general picture allows such an interpretation. Accordingly, the appointment of

³¹ Anna Komnene describes him as *topoteretes* of Pontic Heraclea and Paphlagonia. Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, ix, 3: εὐθὺς οὖν πρὸς ἅπαντας διαφόρους σχεδιάζει γραφάς, πρὸς τε τὸν Δαβατηνὸν **τοποτηρητὴν τῆς κατὰ Πόντον Ἡρακλείας καὶ Παφλαγονίας** χρηματίζοντα. See also Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 115, p. 91; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Dabatenos 101; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 74.

³² See also Ch. 4, fn. 33.

³³ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, nr. 81, p. 431.

Gregorios Taronites as *doux* of Trebizond represented a conciliatory gesture by Alexios I although Gregorios Taronites did not respond to it. The chasm between the emperor and the Taronitai was deeper than Alexios had imagined. As in many other examples presented here, Alexios seemed to evaluate the loyalty of those related to him falsely.

This short and seemingly unimportant episode is interesting, for it allows us to observe how Alexios I used his family policy as an attempt to hinder or to neutralize autonomous tendencies in the provinces. In the case of Pontos, Alexios I intended firstly to link the Gabras family with himself, but he failed due to the staunch resistance of Theodoros and Gregorios Gabras. After the death of the first and the disgrace of the second, the emperor could temporarily establish an imperial representative in Trebizond with the support of part of the local elite. The substitution of Dabatenos by Gregorios Taronites, the emperor's relative by marriage, was probably meant to increase the Komnenian grip over a region so far controlled by groups connected with the Gabrades and therefore, hostile to the Komnenoi. It was also a conciliatory gesture to the Taronitai, but it reintroduced instability in this province. This first attempt to make the Pontos region independent of Constantinople failed, but it is rather illustrative as far as local pressure towards independence and the limits of the family politics, the bedrock of Alexian internal policy, are concerned.

5.3 The Aaron Conspiracy (1107)

In 1107, the last murder conspiracy against Alexios took place.³⁴ In November of that year, the emperor departed to campaign against Bohemond of Taranto, who disembarked on Byzantine territory with a considerable force. According to Anna Komnene, on this occasion, Alexios was accompanied by Eirene Doukaina and some other unnamed relatives.³⁵ At the beginning of this campaign, not long after Alexios left Constantinople, he discovered an assassination plot against him being woven by the brothers Aaron and Theodoros, offspring of a family with Bulgarian origins, the Aaronios, together with others, whose names Anna Komnene prefers not to mention.³⁶ Nevertheless, the extent of this conspiracy seems to have been very limited, for its

³⁴ On the Aaron conspiracy, see Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 13, i, 5–10; see also Božilov, *Les Bulgares*, pp. 174; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry n. 132, pp. 102, 368; Leib, *Complots à Byzance*, pp. 271–273; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 3f.

³⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 13, i.

³⁶ Anna Komnene mentions that Aaron is an illegitimate issue of the family Aronios originated in Western Bulgaria. They entered the Byzantine aristocracy with Ioannes Vladislav, see Božilov, *Les Bulgares*, p. 174; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 3.

perpetrators were Aaron's servants.³⁷ The plan was to wait until the empress returned to Constantinople. Since she lingered on camp, the conspirators tried to accelerate her departure by writing pamphlets – the *famosa* – and throwing them inside the emperor's tent. In these, the conspirators told the empress to return home and recommended that the emperor should continue his advance.³⁸ Eventually, the plot was discovered when Konstantinos, one of the emperor's servants, overheard Strategios, Aaron's retainer, speaking about their murderous aims. Konstantinos told the emperor what he has heard and Alexios called the aforementioned Strategios, who confessed everything. The *famosa* were eventually found in Aaron's tent. Both brothers and their mother were punished with exile.³⁹

Some details are noteworthy in Anna Komnene's account of the plot. Anna Komnene states that there were other people involved in the conspiracy, whose names she prefers to conceal, but the extent of the Aaron plot seems to be much more limited than the rebellion by Nikephoros Diogenes and the Anemas conspiracy. Its operators were Aaron's personal servants, and Anna Komnene suggests a lack of proper organization. The period of the conspiracies that involved a significant number of army officials and senators from inside and outside the Komnenian family seemed to be over. The list of those punished (the brothers and the mother) gives the impression that the Aaron conspiracy was a family initiative. Therefore, we may well ask what the brothers Aaron and Theodoros intended with their attempt. Anna Komnene does not say at any point that they strove for the imperial title. Their lack of proper political support is also a strong sign that imperial claims were out of the question. Maybe the context in which the conspiracy took place contributes to its understanding.

In a previous chapter, we noticed Robert Guiscard's willingness to meddle in Byzantine internal politics in order to achieve his goals. Bohemond of Taranto, his son, behaved similarly when he brought back with him some Greek and Thracian aristocrats together with a person claiming to be one of the sons of Romanos IV Diogenes, to Italy and then to France after he was released from captivity in 1103.⁴⁰ As his father had done in 1081, as he allowed an imposter pretending to be Michael VII Doukas to accompany him, Bohemond's aim with this initiative was to legitimize his invasion by presenting Alexios I as a usurper and himself as the protector of the imperial rights of a deposed

³⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 13, i, 5.

³⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 13, i, 6.

³⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 13, i, 8–10.

⁴⁰ See Ch. 4, fn. 66.

emperor, in this case, one of Diogenes' sons. Moreover, if we consider that historical Thracia had been under Bulgarian control for a long time, we wonder whether some of the *illustres* accompanying Bohemond labelled as Thracian were actually Bulgarians.⁴¹ There is no direct link between the murder attempt organized by the Aaronios and Bohemond of Taranto. However, the moment at which it took place as the emperor left Constantinople to lead the Byzantine counteroffensive against the Norman prince, the limited extent of the conspiracy which most certainly rules out any imperial aspiration, and the Bulgarian origins of the conspirators do not exclude the possibility that this attempt was somehow connected with the Normans.

5.4 Eastern Provinces, Paulicians in Thracia and Michael of Amastris

There are some episodes and regions that were not central to the political opposition to Alexios I Komnenos, but which cannot be ignored, since they were either examples of resistance to the central authority in Constantinople or, at least, autonomous actions which disregarded the interest of the power elite in Constantinople. These were the emergence of autonomous potentates in the former Eastern Frontier, the insubordination of the Paulicians in Thracia and the rebellion of Michael of Amastris

The Byzantine Eastern frontiers were politically and culturally peculiar. If the Northern and Western frontiers were defined by geographical features, the Adriatic Sea and the Danube River, the same cannot be said about the Eastern frontier. Beyond the so-called Greater or Roman *themata*, there was a line of smaller *themata* called Armenian or Frontier (*akritika*). Some of them were composed solely of one city or one stronghold accompanied by its hinterland. Their governors were often local dynasts of Armenian, Georgian or Arabic origin, who chose to recognize the emperor's ascendancy in exchange for court titles, stipends, and imperial recognition of their local authority. Moreover, neighboring independent domains were approached by the imperial government in order to gain their support against Byzantine enemies.⁴² In the tenth century, Byzantium initiated a process of annexing these independent frontier principalities by cooptation or by force, the last one being Ani in 1045.⁴³

⁴¹ Chalandon assumes that the ease with which the Normans occupied the regions of the former Bulgarian Empire was due to the local population's hatred towards the Byzantine administration, see Chalandon, *Essai*, pp. 7, 73; on the Bulgars under Byzantine rule, Božilov, *Les Bulgares*, pp. 141–190; Mullett, Mullett, *Theophylact of Ochrid*, p. 53–68.

⁴² On the Byzantine Eastern frontier, see Ch. 1, fn. 50.

⁴³ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 79–82.

Relations between Constantinople and its Eastern frontiers were difficult. In contrast to the main provinces, which were ethnically and religiously more homogeneous, the Eastern frontiers were a melting pot, in which the Armenian and Syrian Miaphysites were numerous. Consequently, the religious differences were often a source of problems, especially when the emperors or patriarchs of Constantinople tried to force these populations into accepting Chalcedonian precepts.⁴⁴ Therefore, in order to keep these regions in the Byzantine zone of influence, caution was recommended. Kekaumenos' advice reflects the perception that Byzantine control over those regions was very fragile, for he recommends the commander not to be too strict with the discipline of the frontier troops to avoid rebellion, and not to trust the neighboring potentates who were always waiting for an opportunity to seize imperial lands.⁴⁵

With the defeat in Manzikert in 1071, this fragile balance suffered a severe blow. However, the end of Byzantine Anatolia did not come as fast as once imagined. Cheynet demonstrates how, even ten years after this defeat, a significant number of the Anatolian cities were still in Byzantine hands although the mobility of the Turkish bands gave the impression that the whole region was occupied by them. Since the Empire was convulsed by internal strife and civil war, local resistance could not expect to receive any support from Constantinople.

When Alexios Komnenos took power in 1081, the Byzantine defense system still existed and the Turks did not have access to the sea apart from the Propontis and were unable to siege major cities. The Byzantines controlled territories on the coast and some in the interior such as Paphlagonia, Opsikion, Boukellarion, and Thrakesion. The situation was more confusing in the interior, but some regions such as the ones controlled by Bourtzes resisted. The lowest point was reached in 1091, after the beginning of a strong offensive by the Seljuks and Danishmends in 1084, and after Alexios had withdrawn most of the remaining Byzantine troops in Anatolia to build an army against the Normans in 1081.⁴⁶

With the abandonment of Anatolia by the imperial authority due to the internal struggles and later the focus on the defense of the Western provinces, local forces that did not answer to Constantinople appeared. One of them was Theodoros Gabras in

⁴⁴ Vryonis Jr., *The Social Basis*, pp. 161–175.

⁴⁵ Kekaumenos, *Consilia et Narrationes*, 21f, 25, 26f.

⁴⁶ Cheynet, *La résistance*, pp. 131–145. See also Beihammer, *Byzantium and the Emergence of the Muslim-Turkish Anatolia*, pp. 171–303.

Trebizond, and another was Philaretos Brachamios.⁴⁷ The latter was appointed *strategos autokrator* and *domestikos* of the East by Romanos IV. Later, Brachamios did not recognize his usurper Michael VII. When this emperor was deposed, Nikephoros III Botaneiates reached an understanding with Philaretos Brachamios.⁴⁸ Alexios tried to keep formal overlordship over Brachamios and other local potentates, mostly Armenian aristocrats, through concessions of titles and offices. Yet this does not mean that they were subordinated to the emperor in Constantinople. These concessions were rather a tacit acknowledgement of their autonomy and the last effort by Alexios to keep a connection with formal Eastern frontiers of the Empire.⁴⁹ Due to his unpopularity and the Turkish advances, he began to lose territory. Antioch was taken in 1084 and, eventually, Edessa. At the end, Philaretos was forced to accept the authority of the Seljuk sultan of Nicaea.⁵⁰

Another source of provincial rebellion is the struggle between Alexios Komnenos and the Paulician heretics established in Thrace, mainly in Philippopolis and its surroundings.⁵¹ The Paulicians were described by Anna Komnene as heirs of the Manicheism.⁵² However, Anna was probably following here a Byzantine tradition of associating heresies through similarities, although there was no necessary real connection between them.

The Paulicians appeared in the 7th century on the Eastern Frontier. They believed in the benign God of the New Testament and denied the harsh one of the Old Testament. They rejected all sorts of rituals, including baptism, and the institutionalized Church. In the 9th century, the Paulicians became militarized, starting to attack Byzantine positions. Although they were finally defeated by the emperor Basileios I in 870, the Paulicians sustained their presence in Anatolia.⁵³ Later, they were taken from the Eastern frontiers and established in the region of Philippopolis, in Thracia, by the Emperor Ioannes I Tzimiskes (969–976) in order to support the defense of this region against nomadic tribes.⁵⁴

⁴⁷ On Philaretos Brachamios, see Ch. 2, fn. 46.

⁴⁸ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 302.

⁴⁹ Cheynet, *Official Power*, pp. 144f, 150.

⁵⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, ix, 2.

⁵¹ Soustal, *TIB 6. Thrakien*, pp. 399–404.

⁵² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, viii, 3.

⁵³ On the Paulician, see Beck, *Actus fidei*, pp. 35–49; Beck, *Vom Umgang mit Ketzern*, p. 71–75; Garsoïan; *The Paulician Heresy*; Runciman, *The Medieval Manichee*; Soustal, *TIB 6. Thrakien*, pp. 130f.

⁵⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, viii, 5; Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, John1, 4.

According to Anna Komnene, the city became a safe haven for various kinds of dissenters from Chalcedonian Orthodoxy, such as the Bogomils and the Jacobite Armenians. Once established there, these Paulicians began to tyrannize the local Christian population by seizing their property and ignoring imperial envoys.⁵⁵ When Alexios I departed on his first campaign against the Normans in 1081, he was accompanied by 2.800 Paulicians under the leadership of Xantas and Kouleon.⁵⁶ Yet they deserted in the middle of the campaign and did not return despite many offers made by the emperor.⁵⁷ Alexios I put off retribution until the end of the Norman wars, towards the end of 1083 or first months of 1084. On that occasion, Alexios I decided not to answer their insubordination with violence, for he feared to lose soldiers in combat. Instead, he camped outside Mosynopolis and called on the Paulicians to register in the army ranks. Despite their hesitation, the Paulicians came and were registered in groups of ten, disarmed, and then sent to the citadel where they were eventually arrested. Alexios I pardoned most of the Paulicians, sending only some of the ringleaders into exile.⁵⁸

Despite the mild punishment accorded to the Paulician rebels by the emperor, it resulted in another insurrection. When Traulos, a Paulician who became Alexios Komnenos' retainer when the latter was appointed *domestikos* by Nikephoros III, heard that his sisters had been arrested and their properties confiscated, he decided to flee with his relatives and friends, settling in Veliatova, near Plovdiv. He then created an alliance with the Petchenegs, who were settled in the district of Paristrion, by marrying one of the leader's daughters.⁵⁹

Once allied with the Petchenegs, Traulos and his Paulicians enabled Petcheneg offensives. In order to regain their loyalty, the emperor issued a golden bull offering freedom and amnesty to all, which, however, had no effect.⁶⁰ Later on, this cooperation resulted in a Byzantine defeat in 1086 that led to the death of two high officers, Nicholas Branas and Gregory Pakourianos, the *domestikos* of the West.⁶¹ This episode

⁵⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, viii, 7. On Mosynopolis, Soustal, *TIB* 6. Thrakien, pp. 369–371.

⁵⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 4, iv, 3.

⁵⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, iii, 2. See also Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 116, p. 92; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 167–169, 300f.

⁵⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, ii; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1105.

⁵⁹ Paristrion is a thema located at the southern side of the Danube river, see Soustal, *TIB* 6. Thrakien, p. 95; Kazhdan, Alexander. Art. "Paristrion" in *ODB* 3, p. 1589.

⁶⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, iv, 2–4; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1120. On Traulos, see Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 298f. On Mosynopolis, Soustal, *TIB* 6. Thrakien, pp. 197.

⁶¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 6, xiv, 3–2.

demonstrated to the emperor that in spite of their military prowess, the Paulicians were unreliable soldiers. Consequently, Ioannes Zonaras reports that Alexios relieved them from service after his victory in Levounion against the Petchenegs in 1091. According to Zonaras, Alexios' decision was based on "some old laws" that prohibited the service of Manicheans in the military.⁶²

Their quality as soldiers was probably the emperor's motivation to spend a season in Philippopolis during a campaign against the Cumans in 1114, in order to convert the Paulicians living there to Chalcedonian Orthodoxy and to register them in the army once again. According to Anna Komnene and Zonaras, a debate was organized between the emperor, supported by Nikephoros Bryennios and Eustratios of Nicaea, and the Paulician leaders Kouleon, Kousinos, and Pholos.⁶³ Although these three Paulician leaders staunchly resisted the emperor's conversion efforts, Anna Komnene reports that many were converted. According to her, the most prominent among them were made army officials and were given presents, while the simpler men became craftsmen and settled in the new city of Alexioupolis founded by Alexios Komnenos in his own name.⁶⁴

These accounts of the complicated relations between the emperor and his Paulician subjects can be assessed on different levels. The first level is the analysis of Anna Komnene's account. Her report on the conversion of the Paulicians belongs to her efforts in the last section of her *Alexiad* to depict Alexios less as an earthly ruler and more as Christ's representative on earth. This construction reached its climax in her report of the trial against the Bogomils and the burning of their leader Basil, which was reported in the last pages of her book. Nowadays, it is known that this event happened earlier in his reign, but Anna Komnene made an authorial decision to move this episode to the latter part of her History.

Her report about the conversion of the Paulicians is very similar to her description of the trial against the Bogomils. In both cases, Alexios I is presented as the head of the process, a wise theologian, skillful rhetorician and concerned shepherd dedicated to the salvation of his subjects. In her report of the conversion of the

⁶² Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 741.

⁶³ On Kouleon, Kousinos e Pholos, Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, pp. 167–169, 265f.

⁶⁴ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, viii–ix; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 754. On the dating, see Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1268.

Paulicians, Anna Komnene calls her father “the thirteenth apostle”, who should be ranked at the side of Constantine I.⁶⁵

The second level is the emperor’s self-representation. When presenting her father in such terms, Anna Komnene was not fabricating a non-existent persona, but only giving the last literary touch to an image that Alexios I carved for himself, for he made a conscious effort to emphasize the imperial duty of being the guardian of Orthodoxy and the Orthodox Church. When he took the responsibility of converting the deviants dwelling in Philippopolis on himself, he connected the solution of a political problem, the existence of local provincial insurrectional foci, with pastoral work.

The third aspect is the purely political level, that is, to deal with this episode as a conflict between the imperial central authority and dissatisfied provincial population. The Byzantine provincial population saw many sources of discontent in their relation to the central authority, of which the taxes were the most important in the 11th century. In the case of the Paulicians, the reason for their disgruntlement was their refusal to fulfill their military duties, which was strengthened by their heterodox religious stance. Moreover, Anna Komnene affirms, “since Philippopolis was almost completely composed of Manicheans (Paulicians), they tyrannized (ἐτυράννουσιν) the local Christian population and seized their properties, hardly heeding the envoys sent by the emperor”.⁶⁶ The term “to tyrannize” was commonly used in Byzantium to describe unlawful appropriation of imperial prerogatives.⁶⁷ Since Anna Komnene mentions the illegal seizure of property of the Orthodox Christians, it is clear that the prerogative appropriated by the Paulicians was the monopoly of collecting tributes.

The emperor’s reaction follows a *modus operandi* observed in most of his responses to rebellions or any other kind of subversive actions: firstly, a demonstration of apparent wrath (arresting all Paulicians including women and children in the citadel of Mosynopolis) and, secondly, a following demonstration of mercy (releasing everyone, except some of the ringleaders punished with confiscation and exile). However, this response had an unexpected consequence. It antagonized a group of Paulicians led by Traulos, who was once a retainer of Alexios I. This group allied

⁶⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, viii, 8. On Alexios I as the thirteenth apostle, see Mullett, *Alexios I Komnenos and Imperial Renewal*, pp. 259–268; Smythe, *Alexios I and the heretics*, pp. 232–259; Buckley, *The Alexiad*, passim.

⁶⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, viii, 7: πᾶσα γὰρ ἡ Φιλιππούπολις πλὴν ὀλίγων ὄντες Μανιχαῖοι τῶν τε αὐτόθι Χριστιανῶν ἐτυράννουσιν καὶ τὰ τούτων διήρπαζον, μικρὰ φροντίζοντες ἢ οὐδὲν τῶν ἀποστελλομένων παρὰ βασιλείως.

⁶⁷ On the concept of tyranny in Byzantium, see introduction, fn. 57.

themselves with the Petchenegs in Paristrion, resulting in a Byzantine defeat and the death of Gregory Pakourianos, the *domestikos* of the West and first-moment supporter of Alexios' seizure of power.

In her account, Anna Komnene disguises her father's errors by separating the different stages of his dealings with the Paulicians – (1) their decision to abandon the campaign and their punishment; (2) Traulos' decision to rebel and his actions, which resulted in the *domestikos*' death; (3) and the decision to convert and register them in the army ranks – in different parts of the text, although they were obviously connected. It is important to highlight that the imperial daughter does not mention Alexios' decision to release them from military duty, only reported by Zonaras. Yet it seems that Alexios needed the Paulicians' military support once again later. In order to neutralize the source of dissension with the imperial power, Alexios I engaged in the conversion of the Paulicians, partly by pastoral efforts and partly by coercion.

The last episode is the rebellion of Michael of Amastris. While the Byzantines were facing a Pisan fleet which was plundering the Aegean Sea in 1108, Michael of Amastris, responsible for the defense of Akroinos, a fortress in Phrygia, rebelled, seizing the city and plundering the neighboring regions. The emperor sent Georgios Dekanos to repress Michael's rebellion. He quickly seized the city and imprisoned the rebel, who was sent to Constantinople. Following his traditional approach, Alexios I firstly threatened the rebel and condemned him to the death penalty, but on the same day, he cancelled the punishment and lavished gifts on Michael of Amastris.⁶⁸

In her description of this military rebellion, Anna Komnene, who is our only source on the event, emphasizes her father's mercy, not providing any information that could possibly help us to find the causes of the rebellion. However, it is possible to compare the insurrection of Michael of Amastris with the rebellion of Gregorios Taronites. Unlike the case of Gregorios Taronites, no family connection between the rebel and the emperor is known, which would have created a link between this provincial rebellion and court politics in Constantinople. Despite this difference, both rebellions were initiatives by local military commanders that were easily suppressed by imperial envoys. In both cases, the leaders were sent to Constantinople and threatened with harsh punishment. While Michael of Amastris showed humility, Gregorios

⁶⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 14, iii, 5. On the rebellion of Michael of Amastris, Belke/ Mersich, *TIB 7: Phrygien und Pisidien*, p. 177; Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, Entry nr. 133, p. 102; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Michael 293; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 199.

Taronites insisted on his defiant stance toward the emperor. Thus, the first was pardoned and honored and the second was sent to prison.

Both rebellions were also examples of an inherent tension between local elements in the provinces, especially the local elite, and the power elite in Constantinople, that is, the emperor, his close relatives and their allies. This resulted in the emergence of several simultaneous movements claiming autonomy from the central government some decades later.⁶⁹ Most likely, there were aspects of local autonomy in the rebellion of Gregorios Taronites and Michael of Amastris, but the balance of power between Constantinople and its provinces still was still strongly in favour of the capital at the time of Alexios I, hence the imperial envoys had no difficulty in repressing these rebellions.

5.5 General Conclusions for the Period between 1100 and 1118

The Anemas conspiracy probably was the last serious internal political threat to Alexios Komnenos. Cheynet attributes this stabilization to the ageing of the Anatolian army officers, who were active before 1071 and then substituted by younger officers, grown up accustomed to the new *status quo*.⁷⁰ Although this hypothesis cannot be excluded, the recasting of the Komnenian establishment in the Synod of Blachernae 1096 seems to have been more important. The alliance with the Bryennioi and other Thracian aristocratic families as well as the repression of the party that did not agree with Alexios' policies toward the Crusaders were also significant episodes. Time was also a legitimacy factor, for the longer an emperor reigned, the more legitimate he was. At the turn of the 12th century, Alexios had been in power for almost two decades and was able to crown his own son as co-emperor.

The expressions of political opposition in the second half of his reign were considerably less abundant and dangerous than in the first half. Though Anna Komnene mentions that there were others involved in the conspiracy of Aaron and Theodoros Aaronios in 1107, her account gives the impression of a plot of very limited extent in comparison with the conspiracies of Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094 and Anemas in about 1100. If the provincial military rebellions of Gregorios Taronites in 1103 and of Michael Amastris in 1108 foretell the fragmentation of the Byzantine Empire at the end of the 12th century and at the beginning of 13th century, they did not represent a

⁶⁹ Lillie, *Des Kaisers Macht*, pp. 105–112.

⁷⁰ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 368.

considerable danger at the time, for both were easily defeated by imperial envoys. Yet some of them were reflections of the internal contradictions of the Komnenian establishment.

The rebellion of Gregorios Taronites and his abusive letter to the imperial relatives and in-laws clearly was an open defiance to the new hierarchy founded by Alexios Komnenos. It was, however, a later reaction that was easily addressed by the emperor. More serious and more complicated seemed to be the rebellions in Crete and Cyprus in the first half of the 1090s. Despite being depicted by Anna Komnene as isolated provincial uprisings, led by unimpressive figures, her account raises many questions and gives a clear impression that their scope was wider than she was ready to acknowledge. The unexplained connection between Nikephoros Diogenes and Crete and the almost covert participation of the unity of the Immortals in the uprising in Cyprus cause suspicions and suggest a connection with the politics at court. It means that in the 1090s the Alexios' grip over his relatives by marriage and his "allies" was weaker and more problematic than his daughter wants us to believe.

6. Ideology and Political Struggles

In a study often mentioned in this work, Anthony Kaldellis claims that the political disputes in Byzantium were contests to decide who would be the best emperor. The postulants presented their candidacy to the people — either the population of the capital and the provinces or the army — trusting that their repute would warrant the people's acceptance. Accordingly, Kaldellis denies in these statements the existence of parties or ideological disputes in those struggles.¹ Similarly, Michael Angold states that, “at least on the surface the Byzantine political process was dominated by slogans and acclamations”.²

In fact, organized political groups representing clear sectors of the society or ideologies were strange to Byzantine politics. Nonetheless, it is careless to state that debates on how the Empire should be administered and whom it should serve did not exist in Byzantium. Dealing with the period before Alexios I, it is noticeable that historians evaluated administrations and the agency of political personages not only according to their political allegiances but also according to their opinions of what good government was. It was also exposed that these debates were not a scholarly digression without practical effects in the political arena.³

Similarly, it is possible to notice that emperors — Alexios I included — consciously created ideological bases to legitimate their position and actions as well as to challenge the opposition. Accordingly, three points will be discussed in the following lines: 1) the models of political agency defended by the opposition to Alexios Komnenos; 2) the imperial response to criticism and to acts of resistance; and 3) the ideological strategies adopted by Alexios for the defense of his imperial position and their implementation. Despite the scarcity of evidence concerning political debate in Byzantium, it is possible to perceive Robert Dahl's differentiation between interest-based oppositional discourse and subversive criticism. Yet the division is not always clear, since subversive discourses could be hidden behind rhetorical praise and hard diatribe could be moral advice if originating from the mouth of a loyal clergyman. We must always consider that the most subversive opinion possible in Byzantium was that

¹ Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, 158f; Kaldellis expresses the same opinion in a previous article, see Kaldellis, *How to Usurp the Throne*, pp. 45f. Yet Kaldellis contradictorily understands somewhere else the Byzantine historiographic texts as arenas of political debate. Kaldellis, *The Corpus*, pp. 213f.

² Angold, *The Byzantine Political*, p. 8.

³ Dimitris Krallis has recently pointed out historiography as a locus for political debate in Byzantium, Krallis, *Historiography*, 599–614.

an emperor was not suitable for the office he held. The system that legitimized his power was never contested.

6.1. The Ideological Basis of the Opposition

Although the criticism of Alexios and his policies was strong, active and numerous, only some of its echoes came down to us in works such as Ioannes Zonaras' critical account of Alexios I's reign and in the speeches by Theophylaktos of Ohrid, and Manuel Straboromanos. Ioannes Oxeites' speeches, despite its hard censure of Alexios Komnenos, cannot be perceived as the voice of the opposition, as it may seem. The criticism of Alexios also cannot solely be reduced to lamentations by groups that lost power after the takeover of the Komnenoi and, accordingly, void of true content.⁴ As observed in the previous chapters, it was not only a particular political group that lost power in 1081 but also a manner of ruling and understanding state functions. Consequently, it is relevant to consider which model of political agency lies behind the criticism of Alexios I's actions and policies.

The search for political theory in Byzantium can be unrewarding due to the lack of any theorization by the Byzantines. Consequently, any study of Byzantine in this direction has to draw a general image composed from a variety of sources from different periods, which can result in artificial images. Yet some streams and trends in the models of political agency are observable in Byzantine accounts. We even find different models in the same work. It is important to highlight the importance of historiographical sources in this task, for Byzantine historians express their conceptions of ideal political agency through their assessments of political agents, actions and policies. After comparing one view with the other, the political discussion in the second half of the 11th century becomes tangible.

It is remarkable that the banalization of court titles was openly criticized during the 11th century. Moreover, there was a clear awareness of its negative consequences for the treasury and the effectiveness of the state. Michael Psellos describes the decadence of the Byzantine state with the image of a decaying body corrupted by the addition of pernicious substances and useless extra members.⁵ It was a metaphor for the consequences of the generous distribution of titles and offices and its negative effects on

⁴ Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, pp. 47f; Magdalino, *Kaiserkritik*, 335–337; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, p. 144f.

⁵ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 52–59.

the state. Michael Psellos mentions two things that preserved the authority of the Romans, court titles and money. To these, he adds a sensible treatment of them and distribution with reason.⁶ Psellos praises the Athenians for their good government, choosing the best among their fellow citizens and the nobility for the civil and military posts.⁷ According to these two statements, Psellos criticizes his former benefactor Konstantinos IX for distributing offices and titles and for disregarding the *cursus honorum*.⁸ Psellos, on the contrary, approves of Isaakios I's initiative of confiscating lay, ecclesiastical and monastic property, as well as abolishing the concessions given by Michael VI. However, the same author criticizes the method adopted by Isaakios I, for he should have done this gradually. The result of his abrupt actions was hatred, not only that of the city mob but also that of the soldiers.⁹

Nikephoros Bryennios seems to be of a similar opinion concerning the distribution of offices and titles. Bryennios states that these should only be given to the best among the senate and the army and to the “ones who contributed to the state with good will”. At the same time, he accuses Nikephoros III of giving presents and distributing offices and titles arbitrarily.¹⁰

Psellos and Bryennios have similar opinions on political agency. Both uphold a limited generosity according to merit and origin despite having very different origins: Michael Psellos was a scholar and bureaucrat of relatively modest origins, and Nikephoros Bryennios was the offspring of one of the most illustrious aristocratic houses with a strong tradition in the army.

In the above mentioned report of a short speech delivered to the army in Schiza some days before the troops under the command of the Komnenoi took Constantinople in 1081, Anna Komnene states that the *kaisar* Ioannes Doukas had said that Alexios Komnenos, if elected emperor, would reward each one of them according to their merits.¹¹ The speech clearly demonstrates that Alexios Komnenos' balanced generosity

⁶ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, 29.

⁷ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, 134.

⁸ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VI, 29.

⁹ Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 60.

¹⁰ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, IV, 1, pp. 256–259: Δυοῖν γὰρ ὄντων πόροι ἐξ ὧν ἡ βασιλεία Ῥωμαίων τὰ μέγιστα ἐσεμνύετο ὀχρηγοῦσα τὰ γέρα τοῖς ἀροστεύουσι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλως εὖνοιαν συνεισφέρουσιν, ἄμφω τοῦτους ἀναστομώσας τοῖς πᾶσι προῖκα ἐκεῖθεν ἀρδεύεσθαι δαμιλῶς ἐχορήγησε· τῶν τε γὰρ ἀξιωματῶν τὰ μέγιστα οὐκ ἀριστεύσι καὶ στρατιώταις καὶ τοῖς ἐκ τῆς συγκλήτου βουλῆς καταγομένοις πεφιλοτίμητο οὐδὲ **τοῖς εὖνοιάν τινα συνεισφέρουσιν**, ἀλλὰ παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι.

¹¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, vii, 2: μεγίσταις ὑμᾶς δωρεαῖς καὶ τιμαῖς ἀνταμείνεται, ὡς ἐκάστω προσήκει καὶ οὐχ' ὡς ἔτυχε, καθάπερ οἱ ἀμαθεῖς καὶ ἄπειροι τῶν ἡγεμόνων. For a general but dated

aimed at the soldiers alone. This could be a consequence of his military *ethos* or more probably of the fact that Ioannes Doukas adapted his message to his audience, which were mostly soldiers.

Michael Attaleiates seems to share Psellos' and Bryennios' opinions on the advantages of limiting imperial generosity in favor of the state finances.¹² Nonetheless, this approval is contradictory to his hyperbolized approbation of Nikephoros III Botaneiates' boundless generosity.¹³ Dimitris Krallis explains this contradiction by claiming that Attaleiates' panegyric of Nikephoros III was embedded as a foreign element in his text and his praise to this emperor is in many aspects ambiguous.¹⁴

That argument is convincing, for Attaleiates is much more analytical and less exaggerated when dealing with other historical figures. The only exception is Nikephoros, the *logothetes* of the *dromou* under Michael VII, who Attaleiates vilifies. These two hyperbolic representations – positive with Nikephoros III and negative with Nikephoros, the *logothetes* – could be explained in part as the expression of personal feelings toward the policies implemented by the *logothetes* Nikephoros, which affected Attaleiates directly, and in part as political expedience. Attaleiates sought a place in Nikephoros III's regime, whose seizure of power was heavily legitimized by the general hatred harbored towards the policies of the *logothetes* Nikephoros.¹⁵

It is wrong, however, to reduce the eulogy to Nikephoros III to empty rhetoric to praise an old emperor, in hope of a good position in his administration. Attaleiates' hyperbole on Botaneiates' policies could also be an attempt to be in accord with the groups that supported Nikephoros III and his adopted policies. When Isaakios I implemented his reforms, after his takeover, cutting stipends and tax exemptions, it resulted in a quick loss of support and in the hatred by the urban masses (*demotikòn pléthos*). As observed, the main beneficiaries of such a policy were the *nouveaux-riches*, whose prosperity came from commercial activities and who sought social recognition. Hence, the opposition to Isaakios Komnenos appeared to originate from this expanded low echelon of the elite who did not approve of his effort to reestablish the ancient boundaries of the aristocracy for financial reasons. When he took power, Konstantinos

overview on those authors criticism's of emperors, Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 122–134 (for Michael Psellos), 148–152 (for Nikephoros Bryennios), 153–157 (for Anna Komnene).

¹² Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 60–62; Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 135–143.

¹³ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 272–277.

¹⁴ Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, 115–170.

¹⁵ See pp. 67f.

X turned to them, seeking support. Later, they backed Nikephoros III's candidacy, choosing him instead of Nikephoros Bryennios, who simultaneously rebelled against Michael VII. Consequently, they were afterwards endowed with his wide generosity.

Participating in the Byzantine aristocracy meant leaving the rank of those exploited by the state and entering the ranks of those who benefitted from this exploitation. Thus, merchants and shopkeepers in Constantinople desired recognition of their new economic position through a share in this system.¹⁶ Attaleiates' encomium of Nikephoros III's generosity – ambiguous, exaggerated and contradictory as it might be – is a reflection of a real political agency model defended by the lower ranks of the Byzantine aristocracy and demanded from the emperors they supported.

When Attaleiates praises Nikephoros III for his nobility and for his generosity, he draws an imperial image that conformed to what was expected by the groups that supported him, namely the Constantinopolitan “multitude” and the circle of military officials from distinct families, namely the Synadenoι, Alexandros Kabassilas, Leon Dabatenos¹⁷, Nikephoros Palaiologos and Romanos Straboromanos.¹⁸ Nonetheless, not all praise to Nikephoros III by Attaleiates was rhetorical hyperbole and a disguise for his real opinion. Nikephoros III's law to protect civil servants from the consequences of political instability issued in 1079 was genuinely applauded,¹⁹ as was his decision to return the piers on the Constantinopolitan shore to their former owners.²⁰

Michael Psellos, Michael Attaleiates, Nikephoros Bryennios and Ioannes Doukas saw the potential danger of this model of political agency and defended a balanced generosity framed by meritocracy and origin. Attaleiates tries to disguise the ambiguity of his position by claiming that limiting generosity for the sake of the state finances was considered a good thing by those who understood matters more thoroughly.²¹ In the course of his work, it becomes clear that Attaleiates considered himself one of those who “understand matters more clearly”. This literary tool was probably a form he adopted to express his real opinion.²² Actually, these authors were supporting a political agency that would benefit them, for according to Bryennios' model; they were either offspring of the most illustrious families of the Empire, such as

¹⁶ On social mobility into the ruling elite in Constantinople, Beck, *Konstantinopel*, pp. 4–10.

¹⁷ Skylitzes *Continuatus*, 185. See also Tinnefeld, *Kategorien*, pp. 135–143.

¹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 2, xi–xii; 2, v, 5.

¹⁹ See Ch. 1, fn. 35.

²⁰ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 277–280.

²¹ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 61: τοὺς ἐμβριθῶς τὰ πράγματα διακρίνοντας.

²² Krallis, *Michael Attaleiates*, pp. 120–126

Nikephoros Bryennios and Ioannes Doukas, or civil servants who gradually ascended to the highest position by merit and through their contacts, such as Michael Attaleiates or Michael Psellos.

The rise of the Principate and then of the Roman Empire took place after part of the Roman elite yielded the conduct of the state into the hands of one individual in exchange for the continuity of the *status quo* and some participation in public affairs.²³ This idea was kept alive during the Byzantine period through court titles, administrative offices, military positions and the income attached to them.

In the 11th century, Byzantine society expanded; thus, a wider layer of the economic elite believed itself to be entitled to this distributive system. The weak legitimacy of the emperors by that time resulted in the strengthening of Republican rhetoric, senatorial prerogatives and bureaucratic corporatism, but not its revival.²⁴ Although this model of political agency was linked with this expansion of the lower layer of the elite who fulfilled the needs of the expanding state and who were rewarded with inflated titles, it also had supporters within other groups inside the elite.²⁵ Konstantinos X adopted it despite the military and provincial tradition of his family, most probably out of political expediency. This caused a lot of confusion among scholars who debated whether he was a “military” or a “civilian” emperor.²⁶ If this understanding of the political struggles in the 11th century Byzantium were substituted by a dispute between different models of political agency, we can conclude that this whole debate about whether an emperor is civilian or military loses its importance. This model of wide generosity was at its height during the rule of Nikephoros III, who enjoyed the support of a small group of individuals of high aristocratic stock with provincial origins and military tradition, as well as that of rich merchants in the capital.²⁷

The lack of success of the group that supported the “wide generosity” model in internal issues manifested by bankrupting of the imperial finances, as well external ones considering the Turkish, Norman and Petcheneg invasions, led to their deposition by Alexios I in 1081. These factions and their ideals of public management were suddenly forced into the opposition. Yet imperial generosity and its recipients were still matters

²³ Lilie, *Kaiser und Reich*, pp. 2f; Pfeilschifter, *Versagen als Kategorie*, pp. 225–228.

²⁴ Lemerle, *Cinq études*, pp. 287–312; Krallis, *Democratic action*, pp. 35–53; Kyritzes, *The Imperial Council*, pp. 57–69.

²⁵ Cheynet, *Dévaluation*, pp. 453–477.

²⁶ See discussion on Ch. 1.

²⁷ Dias, *Nikephoros III*, pp. 297–320.

of debate during Alexios I's reign. It fed criticism by rebels and conspirators, who used it to assemble support against him. Supporters of the emperor who were dissatisfied with some of his policies also participated in these discussions, not in order to depose him but to persuade the emperor to change his agency.

As already said, no account of the rebellions against Alexios by the rebels themselves has come down to us, but it is possible to find some hint of their voices in the report given by Anna Komnene. In the introduction to her account of the conspiracies of Nikephoros Diogenes (1094) and Michael Anemas (around 1100), the author highlights imperial generosity and criticizes the conspirators' ungratefulness. Anna Komnene tells us how Alexios Komnenos reinstated the Diogenes brothers in his good graces after Michael VII exiled them to the Kyperoudes Monastery. Alexios I took them back although he knew they had imperial aspirations. He treated them like sons, reestablished the imperial honors of their mother, Eudokia Makrembolitissa, and awarded Nikephoros Diogenes the command of Crete. Leon Diogenes rewarded these favors with loyalty, but Nikephoros became a conspirator. Alexios continued to treat him well nonetheless.²⁸ Similarly, while introducing the Anemas' conspiracy, Anna Komnene blames the rebels for acting against Alexios although the ruler had granted them so many presents and honors.²⁹

Anna Komnene's defense of her father's generosity could have been more than a reaffirmation of classical imperial virtues, but also an answer to accusations made against him, which justified these expressions of opposition. It is important to emphasize that a large number of senators supported both rebellions. The brothers Anemas even promised to crown Ioannes Solomon, the leader of the Senate, as emperor. Although Anna Komnene says that it was a ruse, since the conspirators wanted only his financial resources and never planned to hail Solomon as emperor, it is possible to imagine that the ringleaders attracted these aristocratic groups with the promise of reestablishing the pre-Alexian *modus operandi* in the running of the state.

The examples mentioned above were taken from the *Alexiad*, which is by nature a complicated source of information for oppositional arguments against Alexios I. However, there are other surviving sources with criticism of Alexios I's policies that strengthen this hypothesis. Despite the limited numbers of surviving critical views, they all touch similar points and seem to be fed from a similar pool.

²⁸ On the conspiracy by Nikephoros Diogenes see Ch. 4.1.

²⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 12, v, 2.

In his two *logoi* directed to the Emperor Alexios I, Manuel Straboromanos puts himself in a supplicant's position although it is possible to recognize traces of criticism in his tone. Gautier argues convincingly that Manuel Straboromanos was the son of Romanos Straboromanos, *meγas hetariarches* and loyal supporter of Nikephoros III Botaneiates.³⁰ The fact that Manuel describes a sudden descent into poverty in his youth and that he occupied the same office as Romanos, *meγas hetariarches*, enables this identification.³¹

Manuel Straboromanos praises the emperor in his *logos* saying that because of his lack of eloquence, he would write to the emperor.³² This means that he was probably not allowed to address the emperor personally. After reporting his family miseries to the emperor, Straboromanos records how he entered the imperial service. There, he noticed how boundless the imperial generosity was although he could not enjoy it. Consequently, he asks the emperor what he had done to offend him.³³ Straboromanos appeals to Alexios I's philanthropy, encouraging him to correct his way before it is too late.³⁴ Because he did not receive an answer to his first request, Straboromanos sent another letter asking the emperor whether he had received his "child".³⁵ Alexios answered saying that he had received Straboromanos' *logos*, praising the humility as well the rhetorical skills of the author although he might have exaggerated in his eulogies to the emperor.³⁶

Straboromanos' speeches or letters to the emperor had two main themes: family disgrace and imperial generosity. Contrary to those around him, the author could not benefit from it despite his devoted service. Therefore, he encourages Alexios I to readjust his philanthropy. It is interesting that Straboromanos, in spite of being listed among the emperor's servants and as a member of the palace guard, was not allowed to

³⁰ Gautier, *Le dossier*, pp. 172–178.

³¹ Gautier, *Le dossier*, p. 183–185.

³² Gautier, Paul: *Le dossier*, p. 181: Ἐπεὶ δὲ διὰ γλώττης οὐ ῥάδιον ἦν ἐμοὶ ὕψει τοσοῦτω κατὰ τὰ βουλευτὸν διαλέξασθαι, εὐθύμιον ἐποησάμην γλῶσσάν μοι γενέσθαι τὰ γράμματα καὶ διὰ τούτων εἰπεῖν τε καὶ ἀνακλαύσασθαι ὅσα μοι πάλαι τεκεῖν ὠδίνει τῆς ψυχῆς τὸ λυπούμενον. (Since, by speaking, it is not easy for me to discourse in this sublimity according to my wish, I cheerfully make my language turn into this writing, and through it speak and ressonate what has been painfully creating distresses of my soul for a long time)

³³ Gautier, *Le dossier*, p. 187f.

³⁴ Gautier, *Le dossier*, p. 192f.

³⁵ Gautier, *Le dossier*, p. 193.

³⁶ Gautier, *Le dossier*, p. 194.

speak to him personally.³⁷ Moreover, the emperor's lack of interests in Straboromanos' request and his compliment for his rhetoric indicates a certain irony.

In his speech to Konstantinos Doukas, Theophylaktos draws two profiles: one of a tyrant and another of an emperor.³⁸ According to Theophylaktos' depiction of a tyrant, the foundational act of a tyranny is the violent seizure of power without the approval of the people. Such an ascent stains the whole reign of the ruler, resulting in a sequence of misery, for his subjects and for the tyrant himself.³⁹ This act leads to the destruction of friendships, effeminacy, poverty, adultery, and oppression.⁴⁰ Finally, the tyrant surrounds himself with armed bodyguards whom he cannot trust.⁴¹ In his depiction of the emperor, Theophylaktos presents him as the opposite of a tyrant, emphasizing his accession to power through the hands of people.⁴²

Although Zonaras states that he would compose an abridged report and follow the historiographic canons according to which rhetoric eulogies, as well as blame, should be avoided, he takes very partisan positions on Alexios I's actions and policies.⁴³ Zonaras accuses Alexios I's troops of behaving like enemies during the seizure of power.⁴⁴ He lists the crimes they committed: raping of nuns, stealing and defiling of church's objects, attacking senators, robbing them of their clothes and leaving them naked and on foot in the streets.⁴⁵ Zonaras clearly links the concessions made by the new emperor to his supporters and relatives with the emptying of the imperial treasury and cancellation of the *rogai*.⁴⁶ The historian accuses Alexios I of using a conspiracy as a pretext to confiscate the property of senators and citizens.⁴⁷ According to Zonaras, the need for resources forced Alexios I to take hateful measures, such as illegally collecting non-existent debts, confiscating properties, demanding new taxes, and seizing ecclesiastical property. Alexios devaluated the *nomisma* again, increasing the amount of copper in it. The emperor paid his courtiers with devaluated coin but still demanded that taxes should be paid with purer currency. Lacking copper, he destroyed public buildings

³⁷ On the office of (megas) hetareiarques, see Kazhdan, Alexander, Art. "Hetareiarques" in Kazhdan, ODB, 2, pp. 925f.

³⁸ On mirror of princes in Byzantium see introduction, fn. 150.

³⁹ Gautier, Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina, p. 195.

⁴⁰ Gautier, Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina, pp. 197–199.

⁴¹ Gautier, Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina, pp. 199.

⁴² Gautier, Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina, p. 199.

⁴³ For literature on Zonaras' criticism to Alexios I, see introduction, fn. 134.

⁴⁴ Ioannes Zonaras, Epitomē Historiōn, 3, 728f.

⁴⁵ Ioannes Zonaras, Epitomē Historiōn, 3, 729.

⁴⁶ Ioannes Zonaras, Epitomē Historiōn, 3, 732f.

⁴⁷ Ioannes Zonaras, Epitomē Historiōn, 3, 736.

in search of this material.⁴⁸ In his summary of Alexios I as an emperor, Zonaras claims that he was a decent man, but that this was not enough for an emperor. An emperor should also care for justice, show consideration for his subjects and respect the state traditions.⁴⁹ Zonaras then accuses Alexios of dealing with public issues not like an administrator, but as an owner. Moreover, Alexios did not show the senators due respect, refused to grant them a proportionate income and lowered them.⁵⁰ In the meanwhile, the emperor's relatives and supporters were benefited with yearly stipends, surrounding themselves with retinues adequate for emperors.⁵¹

Zonaras' statements were stamped as being in the interest of the senatorial class whose influence and position were lowered by Alexios I, the representative of the military aristocracy. This vision, although not completely wrong in itself, is an oversimplification. Zonaras was the *megas droungarios* of the watch, *protoasekretis* and an offspring of a family with some tradition in bureaucracy.⁵² His career and family position probably exercised some influence on his evaluation of Alexios I's reign, but there is more to it.

In his study of *Kaiserkritik* in the 12th century, Paul Magdalino suggests the ideological basis for the criticism of emperors in the period.⁵³ He mentions the accusation against Theodoros Stypeiotes, *epi tou kanikleiou* and *mezason*, who supposedly said in 1158/1159 that the Emperor Manuel Komnenos would die young and an older emperor would take his place, who would reign through the *logos* as if in a democracy. Even if the accusation was false, Magdalino believes it reflected existent arguments against the emperor's youth and support for an ampler government in which scholars would play a bigger role.⁵⁴ Therefore, Zonaras' criticism was not solely the lamentation of the defeated but also a defense of a political *modus operandi* based on claims for real political participation of the Constantinopolitan expanded elite, and a defence of the generosity towards it.

⁴⁸ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 738.

⁴⁹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 766.

⁵⁰ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 766.

⁵¹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 766f.

⁵² There is a Nicholas Zonaras (mid- and late-12th century), *droungarios* of the watch and *protoasekretis*, Jeffrey et al, PBW (consulted 10.06.2016) Nikolaos 198; Another Nicholas Zonaras (late 11th century), judge of the Hippodrome, *megas chartoularios* and *proto vestarches*, Nikolaos 205; And another Nicholas Zonaras (mid-, late-11th century), judge of Thrace and Macedonia, Nikolaos 20308.

⁵³ Magdalino, *Kaiserkritik*, pp. 326–346

⁵⁴ Jeffrey et al, PBW, Theodoros 186; Magdalino, *Kaiserkritik*, pp. 333f.

Not all the criticism of Alexios Komnenos can be linked directly to the opposition. In a speech dated to 1091, Ioannes Oxeites, the patriarch of Antioch, reserved very harsh words for the Emperor Alexios I.⁵⁵ According to Oxeites, the catastrophes that hit the Empire in the previous years were a result of the sins of the people and of the emperor. Since the populace is too numerous to be addressed, he focuses on the emperor. In his opinion, Alexios Komnenos was successful on the battlefield before becoming emperor, but once he took power Alexios started to suffer one defeat after another. He affirms that Alexios lost God's favor that he had once had,⁵⁶ ascribing his defeats to his many sins, such as the illegality of his accession to power, his oppressive taxes, the despoilment of churches protected by imperial decrees, and the humiliation of the clergy. Oxeites upholds that the rich were impoverished whilst the poor had to abandon their land and seek refuge among barbarians.⁵⁷ In consequence of such criticism, Ioannes Oxeites is considered by some as the voice of the opposition. Yet the information available about his career makes the defense of this idea complicated.⁵⁸

Oxeites praises Anna Dalassene, which could indicate that he was once one of her monastic acquaintances.⁵⁹ His appointment as the patriarch of Antioch before 1089 by Alexios Komnenos, who already had appointed a member of his mother's monastic circle, Eustratios Garidas, as patriarch of Constantinople, strengthens the argument.⁶⁰ Due to insecurity in the Aegean see, Ioannes Oxeites had to postpone his arrival in Antioch at least until 1091. In the meanwhile, he held a speech to the court. The seat of Antioch was particularly complicated, especially under the conditions faced by Ioannes Oxeites, for the Turks had controlled the city since 1085, followed by the Normans after 1098.⁶¹ The patriarch was, accordingly, the imperial representative in Antioch. Consequently, the Turks tortured him during the siege by the Crusaders, for they

⁵⁵ On the chronological discussion on these events, see pages 38f.

⁵⁶ Gautier, *Diatribes*, p. 27. 18–19.

⁵⁷ Gautier, *Diatribes*, pp. 30–32.

⁵⁸ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, p. 361; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, p. 13; Stankovic, *Komnini u Carigrady*, p. 312. A recent paper by Judith Ryder goes into the same direction as the arguments presented in the following lines in understanding the speeches by Ioannes Oxeites not as an oppositional expression, but one that was in agreement with Alexios' political programme, Ryder, *Role of Speeches*, pp. 93–115.

⁵⁹ Gautier, *Jean V l'Oxite, patriarche*, p. 156.

⁶⁰ Gautier, *Jean V l'Oxite, patriarche*, p. 129.

⁶¹ On the political situation of Antioch at the end of 11th century see introduction, fn. 177.

suspected that he was acting as a spy for the Franks. In 1100, he had to leave Antioch for the Franks accused him of conspiring with Alexios to deliver the city.⁶²

We see that Ioannes Oxeites' biography does not present a suitable profile for an oppositional leader. Moreover, this appointment to the Patriarchate of Antioch cannot be understood as a kind of exile. The seat of Antioch was too important and at the same time too problematic. Alexios I needed someone whom he could trust entirely and Ioannes Oxeites fulfilled the task faithfully. Thus, his criticism must be understood as part of his role as a spiritual counselor, like many others who Anna Dalassene sent to accompany Alexios Komnenos during his youth so that she would be assured of her son's spiritual health.⁶³ His rhetoric is similar to that used by Kyrillos Phileotes, a monk introduced to Anna Dalassene and posteriorly sponsored by Alexios Komnenos, on the occasion of visits from various political authorities and the emperor himself with his family. Although Kyrillos Phileotes was more complimentary and submissive to the emperor, he also admonishes Alexios and proposes role models for him.⁶⁴ Despite not being an oppositional voice, Oxeites' criticism is not neutral nor a manifestation of theological virtues. They represented specific models of political action which, in his opinion, Alexios I did not adopt.

After a summary of criticism of Alexios I's actions and policies, some unvarying themes are discernible: disapprobation of how Alexios Komnenos entered his troops into Constantinople without consulting the people and the senate. Theophylaktos of Ohrid describes such action as the inauguration of a tyrannical regime. Ioannes Oxeites states that his violent coup d'état was one of the reasons why Alexios no longer had God's approbation and was punished with defeat. According to these critical opinions, Alexios I's government was characterized by fiscal oppression (Ioannes Zonaras and Ioannes Oxeites) and arbitrary confiscation (Ioannes Oxeites, Ioannes Zonaras and indirectly Theophylaktos of Ohrid) in order to finance an unjust generosity directed solely to his supporters and relatives (Ioannes Oxeites, Ioannes Zonaras, and Manuel Straboromanos).

These examples deny the image of superficiality in the political debate in Byzantium as presented by Kaldellis and Angold. Naturally, the Byzantines did not possess organized parties with clear programs. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence

⁶² On Oxeites' presence in Antioch see introduction, fn. 178.

⁶³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 1, viii, 2.

⁶⁴ Nicholas Kataskepenos, *La Vie*, pp. 90–94 (on the interview with Anna Dalassene); pp. 225–235 (on the first visit of Alexios Komnenos).

of intense discussion among its elite on the goals of the state. Kaldellis and Cheynet maintain that the search for the general common good was a key element in Byzantine politics, but the Byzantines evidently entertained differing ideas of what the common good was and discussed the issue at length. Anna Komnene, for example, not only lionized her father, turning him into an epic and therefore literary hero, but also engaged with the defense of his policies. In her evaluation of the new court hierarchy established by Alexios I, which Zonaras criticizes so strongly, Anna Komnene says that he undertook everything for the Empire's interest and for this reason, Alexios I was the "lord of the imperial knowledge".⁶⁵ Equally, it would be unwise to consider these digressions as scholarly exercises limited to a small circle of learned men and women. On the contrary, the numerous discussions on political action had a direct influence on daily politics in Constantinople. Anna Komnene's report on conspiratorial gossips at the capital's corners could be a (negative) testimonial of such lively political debates. Due to the non-institutionalized status of dissenting voices, criticism could only be uttered in exceptional environments: in the secrecy of trusted acquaintance, hidden in panegyric speeches, loudly uttered by bold churchmen enjoying the imperial *parrhesia* or more openly after the ruler's death.

The emperor could envelop himself with official rhetoric that elevated him above everyone and everything, but in everyday dealings with the administration, he had to adopt one of the many models of political agency discussed warmly by the members of the elite. The opposition operated correspondingly. The rebels possessed their own conceptions of what this common good was. Depending on the chosen model, the opposition would have the support of one or another group within the aristocracy.

6.2 The (Lack of) Imperial Repression⁶⁶

As mentioned earlier, high treason was a crime according to Roman and Byzantine legislation.⁶⁷ Jean-Claude Cheynet maintains that the fate of rebels was normally blinding or the death penalty if they were not pardoned by the emperor.⁶⁸ Yet this does not correspond to the reality of the 11th century. Between 1028 and 1081, Cheynet lists 90 different uprisings of which 16 were successful, for they resulted in

⁶⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 3, iv, 3: ὁ δ' ἐπιστημονάρχης οὗτος τῆς βασιλείας Ἀλέξιος πρὸς τὸ ξυμφέρον ἅπαντα τῇ βασιλείᾳ διφκονόμετο ξενίζων πολλάκις καὶ περὶ τὴν τάξιν τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ περὶ τὴν κλησιν τῶν ὀνομάτων.

⁶⁶ The content of this chapter was extended and published in Dias, *A reação imperial*, pp. 111–137.

⁶⁷ See introduction, fn. 54, 55, and 56.

⁶⁸ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, pp. 172.

usurpations (11), compromises (4) or political autonomy (1). In 13 cases, the conclusion is unknown. Hence, 61 listed rebellions were not successful and whose conclusions are known. Of these 12 were punished with blinding and 4 ringleaders with the death penalty, the typical punishment for rebels according to Cheynet. This represents 33% of the results, but it is noteworthy that half of the blindings was ordered by Konstantinos VIII. Exile (20, that is 39 %) and imprisonment (8, that is 15 %) represent a significant part of the punishments. In five cases (9%), the ringleaders were forced to become monks. Even though the sources do not always mention confiscation, we may assume that this happened in most cases.⁶⁹

This data enables us to observe that the response of the emperors to rebellions was actually variable, depending on different factors: the identity of the ringleader, his or her social status, the type of rebellion, the rebel's connection with the reigning emperor, the danger posed by the uprising and the personality of the ruler.

It is clear that 11th-century Byzantine emperors, in general, did not often use violent punishments. The preference for blinding gave the Emperor Konstantinos VIII the reputation of being cruel.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the blinding of Romanos IV Diogenes was met with commiseration by many.⁷¹ Exile and the tonsure were, therefore, more humane punishments. They allowed the emperors to demonstrate their philanthropy, a traditional imperial virtue. They were also an effective form of removing enemies and repressing their ambitions.⁷² Nonetheless, there were peaks of severe reactions, such as during the reign of Konstantinos VIII (1025–1028) in which blinding became the most common method of punishment. Between 1071 and 1081, there was a sequence of military rebellions and another peak of violent imperial reactions when corporal punishment of rebel leaders became common again. During Michael VII's reign (1071–1078),

⁶⁹ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entries nr. 23–113, pp. 38–90

⁷⁰ On Konstantinos VIII, see Ioannes Skylitzes, *Synopsis Historion*, KonstVII, 1; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 570; Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, II, 2. See furthermore Todt, *Herrscher in Schatten*, pp. 93–105, *Lilie, Fiktive Realität*, pp. 211–222.

⁷¹ The blinding of Romanos IV was dramatically described by Attaleiates, rhetorically justified to some extent by Psellos and later nostalgically portrayed in *Timarion*, see Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 176–179; Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 163–164(b42–43); *Timarion*, 22, 549–563, pp. 69–70. Furthermore, see Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 95, pp. 77f; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 985; Krallis, *Attaleiates as a Reader of Psellos*, pp. 167–191; Krallis, *Harmless Satire*, pp. 221–245; Vryonis Jr., *The Blinding of Romanus IV*, pp. 3–14.

⁷² Fögen, *Das politische Denken*, pp. 46f; Kazhdan, *Aristocracy and the Imperial Ideal*, pp. 43–57; Kaldellis postulates that the absence of punishments and constant amnesties were the result of the Republican ideal of the Byzantines according to which the Byzantines had the “right” to rebel against the emperor, Kaldellis, *The Byzantine Republic*, p. 158f

Romanos IV was blinded and Roussel de Bailleau tortured.⁷³ Both Nikephoros Bryennios and Nikephoros Basilakes were blinded directly after their failed rebellion during the reign of Botaneiates, despite the fact that Attaleiates informs us that this same emperor passed a law that postponed the imperial decision in case of treason.⁷⁴ The *logothetes* of the *dromou* Nikephoritzes was tortured to death by Nikephoros Botaneiates' supporters, who feared that the emperor would fall under his influence as Michael VII had.⁷⁵ Blinding seemed to be the expected fate for Isaakios and Alexios Komnenos if their rebellion had not been successful.⁷⁶

It is interesting to observe the clear contradiction between the mercifulness of Nikephoros III, praised by Attaleiates and the violent punishments and cruel acts attributed to his henchmen Borilos and Germanos.⁷⁷ It must be taken into account that most of the historical reports on the reign of Nikephoros III were produced by authors living under emperors that belonged to the dynasty that deposed him, thus their perception of Botaneiates' reign and the role of Borilos and Germanos was surely influenced by the justifications for his deposition created by the Komnenoi.⁷⁸

When he took power, Alexios Komnenos adopted a particular approach regarding punishment and his dealings with the opposition. Alexios and his form of ruling were already described as ruthless⁷⁹ and brutal⁸⁰. However, it is worth to ask whether they were indeed so. Even if we disregard the apologetic depiction of Anna Komnene, who presented her father as mild and a lover of peace, there is still the

⁷³ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 206f.

⁷⁴ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 315; Zepos/ Zepos, *Ius Graecoromanum I*, pp. 283–288; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1047.

⁷⁵ Skylitzes *Continuatus*, p. 186.

⁷⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2, iv, 4; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, preface, p. 61.

⁷⁷ Anna Komnene attributes decision of Alexios I and his brother Isaakios to initiate a rebellion to Borilos' and Germanos' jealousy, which was caused by the emperor's good opinion about the Komnenos brothers. Thus, the brothers had to flee from Constantinople. The first preface of the *Material for History*, which was not composed by Nikephoros Bryennios, repeated this accusation, adding that it was Borilos' and Germanos' intention to blind the Komnenos brothers. Nikephoros Bryennios attributes to Borilos and Germanos the responsibility of blinding his ancestor. Skylitzes *Continuatus* claims that both were responsible for the generous policy by Nikephoros III of introducing unworthy people into the senate, see Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 2; Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, preface, pp. 59–61, 18, pp. 283–287; Skylitzes *Continuatus*, p. 186.

⁷⁸ Dias, *Nikephoros III*, pp. 297–320.

⁷⁹ Gouillard, *Le procès officiel de Jean l'Italien*, p. 168: Le procès de Jean est, avec la réquisition des trésors de l'Église, l'une des deux affaires qui, au début même du règne, annoncent de ton des rapports entre le nouveau souverain et le pouvoir ecclésiastique. Mais son dossier a l'avantage d'illustrer **avec une brutalité quasi linéaire** la technique d'Alexis.

⁸⁰ Hill, *Alexios I Komnenos and the imperial women*, p. 54: **A ruthless man** with the strength to implement a ruthless regime.; Malamut, *Alexis Ier Comnène*, p. 317f; Neville, *Heroes*, p. 177: The reading that Nikephoros did not write this text to rouse people against Alexios and John but rather to reconcile courtiers to the reality that a **ruthless politician**, like Alexios Komnenos, was exactly the right person for the job, would fit well with later time of composition.

statement of Ioannes Zonaras. He describes Alexios Komnenos in the following terms: “prone to mercy, not quick to punish, moderate in his manners, accessible [...], he was reasonable and behaved towards those next to him not pompously, but spoke with them almost at the same level and jested.”⁸¹ Zonaras was a hard critic of the policies adopted by Alexios I. Therefore, if Zonaras had considered his reign and personality as brutal or ruthless, he would surely have said so. Indeed, the rule of Alexios I was less characterized by political violence than those of his predecessors.

Although the history of state repression in Byzantium is yet to be written, there are studies on specific punishment practices, such as Evelyne Patlagean’s paper on corporal penalties⁸², Judith Herrin’s article on blinding as punishment⁸³ or Michael McCormick’s book on imperial triumphs in which he deals with mock parades.⁸⁴ We already stated that the imperial response depended on many factors, such as the personality and political position of the reigning emperor, the social status of the rebel, his relationship with the emperor and historical conditions. Accordingly, the punishments happened almost independently of the legislation and in many cases, it seems that several rebels, supposed or real, did not face any trial, being often executed or blinded immediately or later in some hidden location. This flexibility and detachment from any legal codification allowed the emperors to create their own repression policy.

Alexios I acted somewhat differently from his predecessors. If we return to Cheynet’s list of rebellions and add some other oppositional movements he omitted, there is a list of twenty rebellions, conspiracies and political trials in the thirty-seven years in which Alexios reigned.⁸⁵ Accordingly, the emperor had three favorite responses: confiscations were mentioned in five episodes⁸⁶, exile in three⁸⁷ and,

⁸¹ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 765: πρὸς ἔλεον εὐκατάφορος, πρὸς κόλασιν οὐκ ὀξύρροπος, μέτριος τὸ ἦθος, εὐπρόσιτος, [...], ἐπιεικῆς τε καὶ τοῖς περὶ αὐτὸν οὐ σοβαρῶς προσφερόμενος, ἀλλ’ ἐκ τοῦ ἴσου σχεδὸν ὁμιλῶν τε καὶ χαριεντιζόμενος.

⁸² Patlagean, *Byzance et le blason pénal du corps*, pp. 405–427.

⁸³ Herrin, *Blinding in Byzantium*, pp. 56–68.

⁸⁴ McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, *passim*.

⁸⁵ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entries nr. 114–133, pp. 90–103. I decided to leave out the entry nr. 134, which deals with the succession of Alexios I and the struggles between Anna Komnene and her brother Ioannes Komnenos. I added to the list the trials of Ioannes Italos and of the Bogomils, which were heresy trials, but they were at the same time highly political due to the close imperial involvement in them. Lastly, I added another rebellion in Cyprus, which happened seemingly shortly before Alexios Komnenos’ death in which the *doux* of the island (Philocales?) was murdered by the inhabitants. Orderic Vitalis, *The Ecclesiastical History*, vol. VI, Book XI, 28, pp. 128–133.

⁸⁶ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entries nr. 116 (Paulicians in 1083); 120 (Pounteses in 1083); 124 (Humbertopulos terminus ante quem 1091); 128 (Michael Taronites in 1094); 130 (Anemas brothers around 1100).

⁸⁷ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entries nr. 123 (Gregorios Gabras between 1091 and 1092); 128 (Michael Taronites in 1094); 132 (Aaron in 1107).

stunningly, five rebellions or conspiracies resulted in some kind of amnesty or agreement.⁸⁸ Violent reactions were clearly avoided by Alexios. Blinding is mentioned in two episodes, both connected with the Diogenai.⁸⁹ The death penalty was applied only once: against Basileios, the Bogomil leader.⁹⁰ Two episodes, the uprising in Crete and the Emir Tzachas' imperial aspirations, resulted in the death of the rebel leaders, but not by imperial hands.⁹¹ Interestingly, there are four registers of mock parades as punishments for conspirators and rebels: the anonymous rebel reported by Theophylaktos of Ohrid in 1087⁹², Humbertopoulos in the 1090s⁹³, the Anemas brothers around 1100 and Gregorios Taronites in 1108 or 1109.⁹⁴

The first impression given by these episodes is that Alexios's placatory behaviour was not only a rhetorical construction used by Anna Komnene. Alexios was very open to requests for mercy, especially when they came from his family. He decided to set aside the accusations made against his nephew Ioannes Komnenos by his brother and brother-in-law, respectively Adrianos Komnenos and Nikephoros Melissenos, for the sake of his relationship with his older brother, the *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos, who was Ioannes Komnenos' father.⁹⁵ He suspended the blinding of Michael Anemas in consequence of the request made by Eirene Doukaina and Anna Komnene.⁹⁶ He did the same for Gregorios Taronites, the rebel *doux* of Trebizond, at the request of Ioannes Taronites, his nephew.⁹⁷ Moreover, Alexios Komnenos tolerated Nikephoros Diogenes' intrigues, which had involved at some point a murder attempt by the hand of an assassin of Turkish-Armenian origins, for a long time.⁹⁸

This behaviour is surprising not only because of the emperor's extensive tolerance of conspirators and possible murderers, but also because these same individuals who rebelled against Alexios and wanted to kill him had interlocutors very close to the emperor, such as his nephew, brothers, wife, daughter, and son-in-law. These people were able to intervene for them. Such events were obviously not exclusive

⁸⁸ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entries nr. 114 (Georgios Monomacato in 1081); 124 (Humbertopoulos terminus ante quem 1091); 125 (Ioannes Komnenos terminus ante quem 1093); 128 (supporters of Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094); 133 (Michael of Amastris between 1111 and 1112).

⁸⁹ See Ch. 4.1.

⁹⁰ On the trial of the Bogomils and its dating see Ch. 6, fn. 129.

⁹¹ On the rebellions in Crete and Cyprus, see Ch. 5.1.

⁹² Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridentis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 228–231.

⁹³ Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 124.

⁹⁴ On Gregorios Taronites and his rebellion, see Ch. 5.2.

⁹⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 8, vii, 3 – viii, 4.

⁹⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 12, vi, 7–9.

⁹⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 12, vii, 3–4.

⁹⁸ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 9, vi, 4. On the first murder attempt, see 9, vii, 5–6.

to the reign of Alexios I. Romanos Diogenes faced a trial after being accused of conspiring against the regency of Eudokia Makrembolitissa in 1067, but was spared by her because of her intentions of marrying him and making him emperor.⁹⁹ Anna Dalassene, Alexios' mother, was accused of keeping correspondence with Romanos IV during the civil war between him and the Doukai in 1072. She did not suffer any punishment beyond a short exile, probably because of her contacts in the court.¹⁰⁰

The frequency of such episodes during Alexios' reign is nonetheless unique. It can be attributed to the frailty of his own legitimacy and of the family government he established. When Alexios elevated his relatives to a semi-imperial status, making them part of the government on a level that no other emperor had before, he made himself more susceptible to internal pressure from them than his predecessors were. By the reign of Alexios I, the Komnenian party was not still a merged group, but a cluster of *oikoi*, familial nucleuses, united by some shared interests, but with independent networks of alliances, family relations, and friendships. Hence, conspirators and rebels could employ their personal connections related to the emperor in order to appeal to him. As mentioned above, this strategy was not new, but, in Alexios I's time, the imperial entourage was more influential than ever and Alexios Komnenos was simply not able to deny some requests. Anna Komnene, a masterful literary craftswoman, transforms his inherent frailty into an imperial virtue.

Another detail related to Alexios Komnenos' punishing methods that deserves attention is his preference for mock parades. This kind of punishment was applied during his reign in four known episodes. They were interesting phenomena due to their popular and extra-legal aspect.¹⁰¹ In his study of Roman and Byzantine triumphs, Michael McCormick observes an "aristocratization" of Byzantine triumphs during the reign of the emperors of the Macedonian dynasty. Those rulers seemingly granted the central role in the triumphs, at least in part, to the leading generals. Accordingly, McCormick states that the fact that the most common form of triumph in the 11th century was the mock parades represents a decay of this trend.¹⁰² Therefore, if the increasing aristocratic participation in the triumphs of the 9th and 10th century was one more symbolic arena for the political disputes within the Byzantine elite, the use of

⁹⁹ Michael Ataliates, *Historia*, 97–99; Michael Psellos, *Chronographia*, VII, 131. See also Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 90, 91, pp. 74f.

¹⁰⁰ Nikephoros Bryennios, *Hyle Historias*, I, 22, pp. 128–130.

¹⁰¹ Heher, *Heads on Stakes*, pp. 12–20; McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, pp. 179–188.

¹⁰² McCormick, *Eternal Victory*, pp. 178–184.

mock parades to chastise rebels, mostly of aristocratic provenance, was a symbolic gesture of aristocratic humiliation. They were equally acts of mercy, since these spectacles were often substitutions for blinding or the death penalty.¹⁰³

Dominik Heher points to a similar direction. In his opinion, mock parades were moments in which “social hierarchy was turned upside down.”¹⁰⁴ According to Heher, the people of Constantinople participated and executed the punishment by beating and humiliating the rebel during the parade. The event, however, was staged. For Heher, it means that this apparent state of anarchy was evidence of a functioning hierarchical state centered on the emperor, being the audience an instrument of the imperial power. Moreover, the ritualistic punishment of the rebel had also the function of bonding the emperor with the people.¹⁰⁵

That last aspect is the most interesting, for Alexios I was the emperor who used mock parades most often and was the emperor who had the most complicated relation to the capital too.¹⁰⁶ These two facts cannot be a mere coincidence. A clear image seems to appear. On the one hand, Alexios was a faction leader in a weak position, who had to yield constantly to the requests of his allies, and on the other hand, he was the newly crowned emperor, who carried the stigma of being a usurper until late in his reign, compromising his relationship with his subjects. Thus, the use of mock parades as a form of punishment conforms perfectly with the political reality of Alexios I. While it was a more merciful punishment than blinding and, therefore, a compromise with his allies and family members, who had relatives and friends among the rebels, it was an effort to bond with the city’s populace, whose attitude toward their new emperor was most probably not positive at the beginning of his reign.

6.3 The Relations Between Emperor, People, and Church

The relations between Alexios and Constantinople and the Church were long considered one of subjugation. According to Hans-Georg Beck and Paul Lemerle Alexios I was responsible for the repression of Republican (Beck)¹⁰⁷ or progressive

¹⁰³ Ibid, pp. 186.

¹⁰⁴ Heher, *Heads on Stakes*, p. 19

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

¹⁰⁶ There is one reference to mock parades during Romanos III Argyros’ reign (Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 32, p. 42f), one during Zoe and Theodora’s (Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 59, p. 56) and three during Konstantinos IX Monomachos’ (Cheynet, *Pouvoir*, entry nr. 61, pp. 58f; nr. 62, pp. 59f; nr. 65, pp. 59–61).

¹⁰⁷ Beck, *Senat und Volk*, pp. 59–62.

(Lemerle)¹⁰⁸, tendencies fostered by former emperors, such as Konstantinos IX Monomachos or Nikephoros III Botaneiates.

These conclusions are based on his actions towards the Senate; especially that group of rich merchants and workshop owners elevated to the senatorial order by former emperors, as he cancelled the *rogai* and issued a decree limiting the access to senatorial privileges for people who still exercised commercial and manufacturing activities.¹⁰⁹ The heresy processes during the reign of Alexios I, many conducted by the emperor himself, were attributed to some degree of anti-intellectualism on the part of this emperor. It is as if Alexios had a very straight belief and as if he were heavily influenced by a group of monks who frowned upon the philosophical discussions carried out by scholars supported by his predecessors, especially the Doukai. Advocates of such views are Robert Browning¹¹⁰, Lowell Clucas¹¹¹, and Anthony Kaldellis.¹¹² Overall, all these surveys assume and at the same time conclude that his actions were the result of an intrinsic division within the Byzantine aristocracy between a traditional military stratum and cultured bureaucracy.

Michael Angold suggests that the aforementioned actions and some others, such as the renewal of the *Orphanotropheion*, the Orphanage of Saint Paul, were aimed at breaking the patrimonial relations between the city elite and its populace.¹¹³ Dionysios Mamankakis develops this argument in his thesis. He maintains that Alexios' efforts against heresy and his actions to pose himself as a "champion of Orthodoxy" were responses to the heavy criticism he had to face at the beginning of his reign due to his violent seizure of power, the scandalous affair with Maria of Alania and the confiscation of church property.¹¹⁴ Since he was hindered by the complicated financial situation from emulating his predecessors, who strongly employed philanthropy to forge their public images, Alexios I based his image on the virtue of piety.¹¹⁵ Therefore, Mamankakis states that Alexios' efforts to repress heresy were not sincere, but only a method to connect himself with the Constantinopolitan people as the defender of the true faith.

¹⁰⁸ Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, pp. 309–312.

¹⁰⁹ Beck, *Senat und Volk*, pp. 61f; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1162a; Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, p. 291f.

¹¹⁰ Browning, *Enlightenment and Repression*, pp. 3–23.

¹¹¹ Clucas, *The Trial of John Italos*, *passim*.

¹¹² Kaldellis, *Hellenism in Byzantium*, p. 227.

¹¹³ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire. A Political History*, pp. 146–148.

¹¹⁴ Mamankakis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας*, pp. 90–136.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 43–73. On imperial virtues, see Dudek, *Pęknięte zwierciadło*, pp. 345–354; Kazhdan, *The Aristocracy*, pp. 43–57; Karlin–Hayter, *Alexios Komnenos. 'Not in the Strict Sense of Word an Emperor'*, pp. 133–145.

Although Angold's suggestions and Mamankakis' analysis point in the right direction, some elements must still be clarified. Mamankakis maintains that Alexios built his image as the champion of Orthodoxy in order to conquer the public opinion of the people of Constantinople, but he tackles neither the functioning of Constantinopolitan society nor the effect of Alexios' ideological strategies deeply enough. At first, it is interesting to recall a very illustrative report by Attaleiates in which he describes how imperial benefactions to the Constantinopolitan elite were only the peak of a patronage network that linked the emperor with the most humble inhabitants of the capital. Attaleiates tells us how imperial stipends to the court dignitaries put in motion a massive pilgrimage of the poorest to the door of the beneficiaries. The poor also expected to be benefited with some part of the imperial benevolence.¹¹⁶ As Mamankakis correctly affirms, Alexios I was not able to continue this practice due to the state's financial crisis, at least not to the same extent as his predecessors. His limited generosity restricted this practice only to his family members, who founded monasteries and to his own initiative of reforming and expanding the *Orphanotropheion*.¹¹⁷

Paul Magdalino describes Constantinople during Manuel I Komnenos' reign (1143–1180), Alexios' grandson, as being dominated by a network of lay and monastic *oikoi* linked with the imperial family, on which most of the urban destitute depended.¹¹⁸ This shows how successful Alexios' strategies were in a long term, but does not describe its implementation. Accordingly, in the following lines firstly the political aspects of the initiatives taken by Alexios to safeguard the Church doctrine will be discussed, especially the heresy trials. Secondly, we will consider how these actions fit into a strategic attempt to discredit potential opponents within the Constantinopolitan elite in the face of the city populace connected with that same elite by patronage. Thirdly, we must ask how Alexios tried to create links with this same urban group through spectacular punishments, philanthropic measures, and piety.

¹¹⁶ Michael Attaleiates, *Historia*, 276f.

¹¹⁷ On the *Orphanotropheion*, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 15, vii, 3–9; Nicholas Kataskepenos, *La Vie*, pp. 551–562; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, nr. 1220a [1270]; Magdalino, *Innovations in Government*, pp. 156–162; Mamankakis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας*, pp. 70–73; Miller, *The Orphans*, pp. 209–246.

¹¹⁸ Magdalino, *The Empire*, pp. 109–123.

6.3.1 Ecclesiastical and Political Struggles during the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos

The first ecclesiastical issue that Alexios I had to face was not initiated by the emperor; on the contrary, the initiative was directed against him. He had to face a serious financial crisis at the beginning of his reign while confronted simultaneously with a Norman invasion. This situation demanded an immediate response. The solution he found was the confiscation of ecclesiastical property. Although the extent of this course of action did not seem particularly far-reaching, it resulted in strong and persistent resistance by a part of the clergy led by Leon, the bishop of Chalcedon. It was already pointed out that there is strong evidence that this seemingly exclusively ecclesiastical matter was used by different groups inside and outside the Komnenian establishment to express their dissatisfaction with Alexios' policies.¹¹⁹

During that crisis, Leon of Chalcedon not only resisted the confiscation of church property but also accused the emperor and the Patriarch Eustratios Garidas of Iconoclasm and Messalianism.¹²⁰ Leon of Chalcedon's accusations also opened a new front for the political opposition to Alexios I in addition to his highly criticized seizure of power, his flawed legitimacy and the asymmetrical generosity towards his relatives. That his presumed hostility toward the Church became one of the most important aspects of the criticism of him is clear in the speech of Ioannes Oxeites, the patriarch of Antioquia, in 1091. As observed earlier, Ioannes Oxeites was not a member of the opposition to Alexios I, but one of the monks close to the emperor who made prophecies and gave him moral advice. Accordingly, as part of this monastic circle, Ioannes Oxeites enjoyed the *parrhesia* allowed to the clergy. However, we assume that the emperor was admonished mostly in private and the reason for the public character of his harsh diatribe is propagandistic.¹²¹ Firstly, with this speech, Alexios was able, as Peter Frankopan correctly emphasizes, to place the blame for his unpopular measures on his relatives.¹²² Moreover, Judith Ryder has recently proposed that Oxeites' speeches gave a framework to theological positions that Alexios was defending at the time, thus the emperor not only must have known the content of Oxeite's speeches, but also must

¹¹⁹ On the Leon of Chalcedon controversy, see Ch. 3.4.4.

¹²⁰ Gerhold, Le "mouvement chalcédonien", pp. 89–91.

¹²¹ On the orality of Oxeites' speech, see Frankopan, *Where Advice*, p. 81, n. 53; p. 84, n. 71; Gautier, *Diatribes*, pp. 5f.

¹²² Frankopan, *Where Advice*, pp. 71–88, especially p. 84.

have approved of it.¹²³ Secondly, although Ioannes Oxeites was not a mouthpiece of the opposition, much of his criticism of Alexios Komnenos was shared by the emperor's enemies. By allowing these censures to be uttered in a controlled environment, through the mouth of a trusted clergyman, Alexios could assume the role of the "penitent emperor" and at least partially neutralize the criticism he faced.¹²⁴ It must be emphasized that Ioannes Oxeites' speech was written and held at the beginning of 1091, shortly before the Byzantine victory in Levounion over the Petchenegs, which was followed by an array of rebellions and conspiracies in which his relatives participated and played leading roles. Frankopan considers this speech as the starting point for the internal political conflicts of the 1090s in Byzantium.¹²⁵

The portrayal of Alexios as a penitent emperor arises very early in his reign. His seizure of power without any consideration for the opinion of political groups within the capital and the violence unleashed by his troops at the population of Constantinople were unprecedented events that affected his legitimacy. In order to remove these shadows, the recently crowned emperor tried to reconcile with the city and God by convening the Synod, which determined the atonement which he and his relatives, who had participated in the coup d'état, had to make. According to Anna Komnene, even the women followed their husbands. Lamentation filled the rooms of the Palace and the emperor wore sackcloth under his imperial purple robe for forty nights.¹²⁶ This penitence showed the city that the Palace was under new direction. Furthermore, according to Anna Komnene, her grandmother restored the morals in the women's chamber for the first time since Konstantinos IX Monomachos, turning it into a monastery.¹²⁷

These measures were not solely attempts by Alexios Komnenos and his clique to provide an answer to the criticism of his legitimacy but also were a conscious stance towards the predecessors of the Komnenoi, including the Doukai, known by their sponsorship of individuals, such as Michael Psellos, who were interested in Hellenic studies and sometimes came into conflict with the Church for this reason. Alexios Komnenos thus legitimated his contested position and his policies towards the aristocracy by distancing himself from his predecessors through his pious attitude.

¹²³ Ryder, *Role of Speeches*, pp. 109–111.

¹²⁴ Rickelt, *Herrscherbuße*.

¹²⁵ Frankopan, *Where Advice*, pp. 84–86.

¹²⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 3, v, 6.

¹²⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 3, viii, 2.

When harsh criticism and conspiracies weakened his position, this pious stance was transformed into a zeal for persecution. If we juxtapose the heresy processes and the period when the opposition to Alexios I intensified, we can observe that these processes coincide with the most complicated political moments in his reign. Ioannes Italos' trial took place some months after the start of Leon of Chalcedon's controversy.¹²⁸ The first hearings of the Bogomil trial seem to have been chronologically near to the conspiracy of the Anemas brothers, namely around 1100. They certainly happened before the death of the *sebastokrator* Isaakios Komnenos between 1102 and 1104, who played an important and similar role as inquisitor in both events.¹²⁹ In June 1107, some months before the Norman invasion led by Bohemond of Taranto in October and before the conspiracy to assassinate Alexios I led by Aaron and Theodoros Aaronites during this same campaign, the emperor issued an edict concerning the reform of the clergy.¹³⁰ This edict established the office of *didaskalos*, whose task was to teach the people of Constantinople correct doctrine and to hunt heretics among them, who should be delivered to the emperor or to any other civilian authority if the matter required state's intervention.¹³¹

The processes against the monk Neilos, the Calabrian, and Theodoros Blachernites could also fit into the pattern and may be contemporaneous with the political crises involving the Diogenai. In the account by Anna Komnene, Neilos and Blachernites trials were embedded between the murder conspiracy in the summer of 1094 led by Nikephoros Diogenes and the Cuman invasion in the following winter led by a pretender claiming to be Leon or Konstantinos Diogenes.¹³² Venance Grumel and Jean Darrouzès affirm that the trial against Neilos and Blachernites took place at some point between 1094 and 1095. However, their dating of the trial against Neilos is solely based on Anna Komnene's narrative sequence while the Blachernites' case is dated with

¹²⁸ See Ch. 3.4.4.

¹²⁹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 15, viii, 1–6. On the Bogomil trial, Angold, *Church*, pp. 479–487; Beck, *Autodafe*, pp. 46–48; Mamankakis, *Ο αυτοκράτορας*, pp. 137–186; Obolensky, *The Bogomils*, pp. 275f; Rigo, *Il processo*, pp. 185–211; Smythe, *Alexios and the Heretics*, p. 238; Trizio, *Trial*, pp. 470–473; On the dating of the trial, see introduction, fn. 114.

¹³⁰ Gautier, *L'édit d'Alexis*, pp. 165–201; Dölger/ Wirth, *Regesten*, Nr. 1220; Gerhold, *Église et aristocratie laïque*, pp. 110–115; Magdalino, *The Reform Edict of 1107*, pp. 199–218.

¹³¹ Gautier, *L'édit d'Alexis*, p. 193.

¹³² Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 10, ii–iv; Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 744; On the Nikephoros Diogenes' plot and the pseudo-Diogenai, see Ch. 4.1.

the support of Anna Komnene's sequence and the citation order of heresies by Niketas of Herakleia.¹³³

This form of dating events is problematic since, as often said here, Anna Komnene's narrative occasionally does not follow the chronologic order of events. Considering that the trial against Neilos took place between the condemnation of Ioannes Italos under the Patriarch Nicholas III Grammatikos in 1084 and the Cuman invasion in 1095, Jean Gouillard establishes an estimated date of 1087 for the process against Neilos.¹³⁴ However, Paul Gautier provides an argument that could confirm the dating given by Grumel and Darrouzes. He links a monk called Neilos, to whom Theophylaktos of Ohrid writes a poem in order to convince him to influence a certain *sebastos* to remove a certain Antiochos from his post, with the monk Neilos, the Calabrian. Anna Komnene's depiction of Neilos, the Calabrian, and the addressee of Theophylaktos of Ohrid's poem have features in common, such as being a monk, the name Neilos and the fact that both are able to exert influence in the aristocracy. Since the poem was written after the appointment of Theophylaktos as archbishop of Ohrid in 1089, Gautier establishes this date as *a terminus post quem*.¹³⁵ The identification is not certain, but likely. If the monk Neilos, to whom Theophylaktos of Ohrid dedicates his poem, is the monk Neilos, the Calabrian, prosecuted by Alexios Komnenos, we can establish a possible dating in the middle of the 1090s for the process against him.

The heresy trials were not simply smoke screens for political persecution as if the heretics were only condemned for being political opponents of the emperor. They had their ecclesiastical and theological aspects. Nevertheless, the timing of those trials is interesting. The trial against Ioannes Italos, the Bogomils and most likely against the monk Neilos, the Calabrian, and Theodoros Blachernites as well as the edict of 1107 to reform of the clergy, can also be considered as reactions to times in which the emperor and his government were more heavily contested. As already stated, conspiracies and rebellions were not isolated events, but the result of previously existing discontent that created suitable conditions for them and provided rebels with supporters. For this reason, it is not surprising that periods of social and political unrest also had repercussions within the Church. Thus, as consequences of escalation of tensions in

¹³³ Darrouzès/ Grumel, *Regestes*, nr. 960(945) and 961(946); On the trial and doctrine of Neilos, see Garsoïan, *L'Abjuration*, pp. 12–27.

¹³⁴ Frankopan, *Challenges to Imperial Authority in the Reign of Alexios I Komnenos. The Conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes*, p. 264; Gouillard, *Le Synodikon de l'orthodoxie*, pp. 184, 203.

¹³⁵ Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Orationes, Tractatus, Carmina*, pp. 123f, 364f.

Byzantine society, the trials or demonstrations of imperial piety were responses to the troubled times and not necessarily to the rebellions, plots or struggles that erupted from it. They might even take place not directly after these events, but antecede them though retaining a broad simultaneity.

The connection between sensitive moments and imperial initiatives to reform the Church and persecute deviations is not completely new. Others have done this when dealing with particular episodes. Dionysios Mamankakis links the trials to the violent takeover and the confiscation.¹³⁶ Paul Magdalino connects the foundation of the Edict of 1107 with the Norman invasion.¹³⁷ However, the assessment and the juxtaposition of heresy trials and persecutory initiatives present a systematic *modus operandi*, which was used consistently during the whole of Alexios' reign.

6.3.2 Alexios Komnenos and the People

The establishment of the Komnenoi as the ruling elite in Constantinople was slow and difficult. The violent usurpation was a stain that obstructed the rapprochement between the City and its new lords for a long time, as it is evident in a short piece of information given by Anna Komnene on when the Crusaders were before the walls of Constantinople. Anna Komnene writes that the city populace panicked, for they thought that the city would be plundered again as had happened during Alexios' coup. Anna Komnene describes the event with the following words: "Not only those of the vulgar mob of Byzantium, those feeble in every aspect and inexperienced in war, observing the ranks of the Latins, moaned and beat their breast in grief because they could not accomplish anything out of fear, but also those who were well-disposed toward the emperor, for they remembered the Thursday on which the city was seized; and feared that at the present time retribution would be demanded for what had been done then."¹³⁸

It is a very interesting remark. Anna Komnene describes two different groups in Constantinople, the populace and the "ones who were well disposed toward the emperor". The first feared another round of plundering and the latter that they will receive the quittance for what they had done. Therefore, the latter was Alexios' original

¹³⁶ Mamankakis, Ο αυτοκράτορας, passim.

¹³⁷ Magdalino, The Reform Edict of 1107, pp. 217f.

¹³⁸ Anna Komnene, Alexiad I, 10, ix, 4: οὐ μόνον δὲ ὀπόσοι τοῦ συρφετώδους ὄχλου τῶν Βυζαντίων καὶ ἀνάκιδες πάντη καὶ ἀπειροπόλεμοι τὰς τῶν Λατίνων φάλαγγας θεασάμενοι ἔστενον ὤμωζον ἔστερνοτύπου μὴ ἔχοντες ὑπὸ φόβου ὃ τι καὶ δράσαιεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ μᾶλλον ὀπόσοι εὖνοι περὶ τὸν αὐτοκράτορα, τὴν Πέμπτην ἐκείνην φανταζόμενοι καθ' ἣν ἡ τῆς πόλεως γέγονεν ἄλωσις, καὶ δεδιότες διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ἐνισταμένην ἡμέραν, μὴ τις ἔκτισις τῶν τότε γεγενημένων συμβαίη.

supporters during his seizure of power. The obvious conclusion from this short passage is that in 1096, fifteen years after his coup, Alexios Komnenos and his supporters were still isolated from the rest of city, openly disliked and living in the shadows of the crime that inaugurated their rule. The reconciliation between Alexios Komnenos and the city was a process that lasted his entire reign and was carried out in two ways: the patronage networks that connected the population and the urban economic to urban elite had to be broken, and the direct patronage relations between the emperor and the population had to be established.

At the economic level, the existent patronage network between the city populace and its elite was broken through a consistent policy of limited generosity and confiscations. Furthermore, Alexios I waged a propaganda war against them. His persecution and imperial efforts to assure the purity of the Christian doctrine at exactly the moment when Alexios' government was most contested was an important part of it. Anna Komnene mentions that Ioannes Italos, Neilos, the Calabrian, and Basileios, the Bogomil were all connected with important houses in the capital.¹³⁹ In Ioannes Italos' case, Anna Komnene is more specific by linking him to one Serblias, one Iasites, and Ioannes Solomon¹⁴⁰ as well with Michael VII and his brothers.¹⁴¹ There are two interesting details in this list of Italos' disciples. First, Serblias, Iasites, and Solomon were families with influence in Constantinople and with a strong presence in the bureaucracy.¹⁴² Second, there is evidence that members of these houses had troubled relations with Alexios Komnenos. Ioannes Solomon participated in the Anemas conspiracy and believed – wrongly according to Anna Komnene – that he would be crowned emperor.¹⁴³ Michael Iasites married into the Komnenian family, but he apparently disrespected the emperor's daughter and the empress, and he was expelled from the Imperial Palace because of it.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ On the aristocratic connections of Neilos, the Calabrian: Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 10, i, 2. On the aristocratic connections of Basileios, the Bogomil, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 15, ix, 2.

¹⁴⁰ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 5, ix, 2.

¹⁴¹ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 5, viii, 4.

¹⁴² On the Serblias, see Gautier, *Theophylacti Achridensis Epistulae*, pp. 117f; Wassiliou–Seibt, *Der Familienname Serblias*, pp. 35–55. The Iasitai appeared at first as military officers, but afterwards the family seems to hold civil offices more often. Ioannes Solomon is described by Anna Komnene in her report of the Anemas conspiracy as the leader of the senators, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v, 4.

¹⁴³ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 12, v–vi.

¹⁴⁴ Ioannes Zonaras, *Epitomē Historiōn*, 3, 739. It is not possible to know for sure whether the Iasites associated with Ioannes Italos was the same Michael Iasites, who married into the Komnenos family, Gautier, *Le synode de Blachernes*, p. 251; Jeffreys et al, *PBW*, Michael 274; Skoulatos, *Les personnages*, p. 119; Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*, 1, 37, 255–257.

At the same time, throughout the proceedings against Italos, popular participation is observable. A mob invaded Hagia Sophia when it seemed that the patriarch was being persuaded by Italos. Anna Komnene describes how he had to hide on the roof of the church.¹⁴⁵ In addition, one may also notice how Alexios I converted the proceedings against the Bogomils into a theatrical spectacle for the city populace.

Anna Komnene describes a play in two acts. The first act took place on the *Tzykanisterion*, the polo field in the Palace grounds, with strong popular presence. Anna Komnene reports that the suspect Bogomils either renounced the accusations or persisted in their heretic positions. Unable to differentiate the Bogomils from the true Christians, the emperor ordered the assembling of two ovens, one with a cross on the top and the other without. Then, he commanded that those who wanted to die as Christians should go to the oven with a cross and the Bogomils should move to the oven without the cross. This angered the public, who sympathized with those who wanted to die as Christians. However, some moments before the execution, Alexios I gave the order to stop, freed the accused who had declared themselves Christians and arrested the Bogomils once again in order to continue the efforts to convert them.¹⁴⁶

The second act took place in the Hippodrome, also with strong public presence. The Synod and the emperor decided that burning would be a suitable punishment for Basileios, the leader of the Bogomil sect. Anna Komnene reports the tension caused by the boastful attitude of Basileios, who believed that he would be saved from the pyre by an angel. After dramatically placing Basileios near the pyre to prove that he could be burned, he was thrown into the flames.¹⁴⁷ On this occasion, Alexios I is presented by Anna Komnene not only as an emperor but also as a show-master with full control over the public.

This account of the Bogomil heresy and Alexios I's action against it is preceded by a description of the *Orphanotropheion*, a huge philanthropic institution, to which a hospital, an orphanage, an almshouse for the crippled, and a grammar school for foreigners and poor Byzantines were attached. This institution, which already existed, was reformed and inaugurated once again by Alexios I.¹⁴⁸ As with the accounts of the Bogomil trial, its foundation happened much earlier than Anna Komnene reports, which

¹⁴⁵ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 5, viii, 5–6.

¹⁴⁶ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 15, ix.

¹⁴⁷ Anna Komnene, *Alexiad* I, 15, x.

¹⁴⁸ On the *Orphanotropheion*, see Ch. 6, fn. 117.

is after Alexios' last campaign against the Turks in 1116.¹⁴⁹ Most likely, the new inauguration of the *Orphanotropheion* happened after the victory in Levounion against the Petchenegs in 1091, which resulted in significant numbers of prisoners of war.¹⁵⁰ Anyhow, these two actions by Alexios Komnenos, the reform of the *Orphanotropheion* and the spectacular execution of Basileios, the Bogomil, are his most important attempts to reconcile with the Constantinopolitan populace. It began with the trial of Ioannes Italos and included the mock parades, which were, as Dominik Heher emphasized, moments of bonding between emperor and people by punishing dissident and offender who had dared to try to depose the emperor.

6.4 An Outline of Alexios I's Response to Opposition

The survey developed here enables us to give an outline of how Alexios I dealt with criticism and opposition. The Komnenian consortium was still in its first days during Alexios I's rule. It was still too small and some of its members held on to goals and loyalties that were independent or conflicted with those fostered by Alexios I. The conspiracy led by Nikephoros Diogenes in 1094, which was formed within the fringes of the emperor's personal and familial circle and was supported by important members of this group, was clear evidence of weakness. Thus, Alexios often seemed willing to yield to appeals by members of his family while at the same time he performed public trials and punishment. This characteristic shows that two emperors existed inside Alexios I: the head of a newly formed aristocratic alliance, which was not stable and could break at any moment, and the "New Constantine", fully conscious of the imperial legacy, who constructed his own imperial image according to models established centuries ago. Consequently, Alexios had to create strategies parallel to the weak and conditioned support offered by his allies. For that, he used violence very rarely, giving preference to symbolic responses to attacks, such as mock parades. The heresy trials were also a response to opposition. Alexios, accused of taking ecclesiastical property illegally, thereby gave a proof of his piety, exposing the heretic inclinations of the Constantinopolitan elite formed by new rich. This social stratum became an important source of support to any oppositional movement against him because of the interruption of the wide generosity policy fostered by his predecessors and his violent seizure of

¹⁴⁹ However, Anna Komnene does not state that Alexios Komnenos established the orphanage after this campaign, but that he left some of the children he had captured during the campaign under the responsibility of this already existing institution, Anna Komnene, *Alexiad I*, 15, vii, 3.

¹⁵⁰ On the *Orphanotropheion*, see Ch. 6, fn. 117.

power. When accused of illegitimacy and illegal appropriation, Alexios answered by pointing out that his enemies were heretics and pagans, and therefore worse than he was. Concurrently, the emperor adopted a penitent stance to reinforce his image of piety and to neutralize criticism.

These actions were also aimed at fracturing the patronage network that linked the populace with the urban elite, establishing a direct bond between the emperor and his people. The success of this initiative is questionable. Although Anna Komnene presents her father as having full control over the people during the public punishment of the Bogomils, the trauma caused by his violent accession to power was too deep to be properly healed. The sudden fear of the population of Constantinople that the Crusaders encamped near the walls in 1096 would plunder the city and their automatic memory of the events of 1081 demonstrate that the inaugural act of his reign was still an open wound fifteen years later. Maybe only the succession could finally cast away the shadow of illegality and illegitimacy that haunted Alexios I, giving fuel to the opposition and hindering a full bonding between the emperor and the people.

During the reign of Leon III (717–741), a similar process took place. Michael Angold observes how this emperor used public humiliation rituals of his enemies to create a direct bond between the emperor and the populace. These actions connected the imperial authority with the interests of Constantinople and its populace, as well its elite. This settlement ended a period of civil strife in which the power was disputed by the military. It resulted in a long period of political stability. According to Angold, another settlement occurred between the patriarch and the senate in the 11th century, aimed at protecting themselves from the changing circumstances. Yet the result was different because, at the end, Alexios I established an aristocratic government and alienated the senate.¹⁵¹ The fact that this emperor founded a government with strong aristocratic tinges does not hinder a similar settlement with the city. It was demonstrated here that this emperor made a conscious effort to achieve a settlement using methods analogous to as Leon III. He used less violence and restricted this policy only to the populace.

¹⁵¹Angold, *The Byzantine Political Process*, pp. 5–21.

7. Conclusions

The previous lines present a more complex image of the opposition to Alexios I Komnenos than is normally accepted by scholars. Instead of fixed political blocks determined by ancient divisions and long-term alliances, we observe fluid groups whose composition was not stable, reacting to the most recent events, both internal and external. As John Haldon puts it, “the relations within and between the different elements which made up these groups remained fluid and subject to constant change, so that it is impossible to speak of clearly identifiable or long-term political solidarities.”¹ Rivalry within the elite and the highly unstable political background of the 11th century in Byzantium did not permit durable plans. Consequently, alliances are understood better as responses to momentary needs than as a means to achieve long-term objectives or part of grand strategies. Furthermore, political instability during the reign of Alexios I was also the result of an ideological battle concerning the function of the Byzantine state and the practice of power in Byzantium. The Byzantines upheld that the foundation of the state was the distribution of titles and offices from which the whole aristocracy should profit and that there should be some opening up to capable individuals from other social strata. In the 11th century, emperors promoted the introduction into the highest ranks of the court hierarchy of members of the expanded elite, composed of merchants and shop-owners who thrived in the economic growth at the time. However, this policy failed at the end of the same century and it was substituted by Alexios I’s “patrimonial solution”, whose aim was to form smaller but more cohesive ruling elite and reinstate the empire’s governability, as well as its capacity to respond to the contemporaneous challenges. It obviously did not satisfy a significant part of the aristocracy because many were overlooked in favor of the emperor’s relatives and supporters.

At this point, it is important to emphasize the role played by the imperial family, the so-called Komnenian clan, as well as its limitations. Instead of a close-knit political group grounded in familial obligations, we see a loose association composed of factions and individuals with varying ambitions, occasionally embittered by long-existing feuds, but united around the emperor, from whom they had different and sometimes contradictory expectations. Consequently, internal struggles arose within the ruling group, in which Alexios I acted as an arbiter. These were, for example, the accusations

¹ Haldon, *Social Elites*, p. 185.

made against Ioannes Komnenos, the *doux* of Dyrrachium by Adrianos Komnenos and Nikephoros Melissenos in the first half of the 1090s, and the quarrel between Anna Dalassene and the Doukai during the controversy of Leon of Chalcedon in the years between 1081 and 1095. These struggles hindered the formation of a united front against common enemies. Moreover, the hierarchy established by Alexios I that favored blood relations over relatives by marriage alienated groups and individuals linked with the Komnenoi before 1081, such as the Diogenai and the Taronitai. Their response was the conspiracy of Nikephoros Diogenes in 1095 and the rebellion of Gregorios Taronites in 1103. On these occasions, we can observe an association between the elements situated at the fringe of the new Komnenian *status quo* and that part of the aristocracy that was excluded from the ruling elite. This frailty together with the number of *porphyrogenneto*i and Alexios' contested legitimacy due to his violent seizure of power and to his confiscations of ecclesiastical property led to the rise of opposition and the isolation of his ruling elite.

The internal contradictions were mostly solved in 1095 through a new pact symbolized by the Synod of Blachernae. The family of Eirene Doukaina withdrew the support they had given to Leon of Chalcedon and his staunch resistance, in exchange for the removal from Anna Dalassene, the emperor's mother who for a long time guaranteed cooperation among the Komnenos brothers, but was occupying the place of leading female figure at court that should belong to Eirene. By the time of the Synod, Alexios had more control over his political supporters, diminishing her importance. In 1095, Anna Dalassene was only a hindrance to a proper cooperation between Alexios I and his Doukas relatives by marriage. This Synod also led to the silent removal of problematic members of the establishment, such as Gregorios Taronites and Nikephoros Melissenos, as well as the rise of the empress' brothers and brother-in-law, who became the second most important members of the Komnenian consortium after Isaakios Komnenos, the emperor himself and later his own sons. Simultaneously, Alexios united his family with the aristocratic lineages from Adrianople through marriage, beginning with the Bryennios. This new foundation of the Komnenian establishment was finally able to assure internal unity, resulting in a clear decrease of oppositional movements after 1095.

While surveying the various oppositional movements and realignments of alliances, the characteristics of the political opposition described in the introduction can be confirmed. Although the Byzantine political traditions offered the possibility of

legitimizing successful coups-d'état, deposing an emperor, even a hated one, was not an easy task. In order to have any chance of success, wide support was necessary and this could only be built up if players representing different groups with varied long-term goals could be brought together to achieve the established goal. Although it is not possible to understand the plots against Alexios I in their deepest levels due to lack of information, the available data enables us to grasp how political opposition was exercised during his reign and the limitations of the regime he established.

Considering what was mentioned above, we can finally put away the interpretation that connects the political struggles during Alexios I's reign to the division between the military aristocracy and the bureaucratic elite. Although this reading was long contested and relativized, the reign of Alexios kept being its last enclave. Undoubtedly, the events give support to such an interpretation: Alexios' troops did attack senators during his seizure of power, many of whom supported conspiracies against Alexios. Furthermore, the emperor cancelled the generous policies of his predecessors that opened the doors of the Senate for a wider sector of the elite. However, Alexios' policies were not determined by his social origins and, accordingly, not the result of a supposed social conservatism or rivalry with the bureaucratic elite. It was rather the contingencies of his time – financial needs, military threats and the response to the opposition – that determined his actions. Similarly, the members of the aristocracy rooted in Constantinople and linked with the bureaucracy and the clergy which was involved with the opposition or with the attempts of deposing Alexios, reacted to the policies just mentioned. Nevertheless, they did not shun from members of the military. In fact, instead of putting forward potential candidates from their ranks, the members of the Constantinopolitan elite turned to the military leaderships as possibilities to depose Alexios and reestablish acceptable policies. Here we see the genesis of the division of the Byzantine aristocracy that was clearly consolidated in the reign of Alexios' direct successors: the military aristocracy formed by the imperial kin and the secondary elite composed by civil servants, clergy, and scholars, which was aware of its subordinated status and strove for positions of service to the highest tier of the aristocracy.

It is also important to highlight the problems presented by the sources. The main source for political opposition to Alexios Komnenos is the *Alexiad* by Anna Komnene. She is also the only source on many events during his reign. In order to interpret the information she provides and to counterbalance its weight for the assessment of the

political opposition better, the account of the *Alexiad* was compared with reports from other sources and analyzed for its literary and political agenda.

Despite her qualities as historian, Anna Komnene is a problematic source. Her emotional attachment to Alexios Komnenos, a father whom she seems to have been very close to, was strong and she possessed literary ambitions. She was not only eager to recount the facts; Anna Komnene also wanted to portray her father as a hero. For this, she adopts models from the different literary traditions which she had access through her erudition. Hence, she presents Alexios as a new or even better Ulysses, David, Salomon or Konstantinos I. This characteristic presents the modern scholar the challenge of separating facts from literary models.

This leads to the issue of how to know in which cases Anna Komnene was concealing or disguising Alexios' errors and failures in order to neutralize them or even to transform them into successes or signs of his good character. This strategy is clear in Anna Komnene's account of Alexios' treatment of Nikephoros Diogenes and the Paulicians. In both cases, Alexios seems to have taken terrible political choices, but they were whitewashed by Anna Komnene.

Nikephoros Diogenes was given the government of Crete with the obligation of living there, but Anna Komnene omits the information whether Diogenes actually ever set foot on the island. Her silence is likely to be connected with the rebellion in that province. She appears to conceal who is really behind the rebellion of Crete. All this half-said and incongruent information leads to the suspicion that Anna Komnene conceals this in order to cover up her father's obvious political error.

In the case of the Paulicians, we notice that Anna Komnene adopted the strategy of cutting the history of her father's dealings with this heretical population in many parts, distributing them along her narrative. When dealing with secondary characters, Anna Komnene usually prefers to form narrative blocks in which all the information about a given person is presented at the cost of the chronological sequence. It is thus striking that she acts very differently when reporting the events concerning the Paulicians. If all the information about the dealings of Alexios with the Paulicians were put together, his errors that led to Paulician support for the Petchenegs and the death of Gregorios Pakourianos, his *domestikos* of the West in 1086, would be clearly exposed. By separating the elements, Anna Komnene was able to present a more positive account of her father, even portraying him as a pious emperor in his decision to convert the

Paulicians to Orthodoxy, which was actually the reversion of an anterior action of releasing them from military service.

Despite his violent seizure of power, his controversial measures, his weak initial support and the active opposition even by members of his ruling group, Alexios' reign can be considered successful. He enjoyed a long reign, ruled according to his own terms, left a political heritage and appointed a successor of his own choice. The cause of this success goes beyond his patrimonial regime, which had many limitations either in its function of providing a unified front against common enemies or in its capacity to avoid the emergence of internal dissidence. Alexios' inaction concerning Anatolia was not the chief impulse for the opposition. Even if Alexios had put more efforts into reconquering Anatolia, the situation would not have changed significantly: the aristocracy who was not linked with the Komnenoi would still oppose his way of ruling the Empire, the fringes of the Komnenian establishment would still antagonize Alexios, its kernel would still be divided by internal struggles and the *porphyrogennetoi* would still continue to feed their own dynastic ambitions.

Alexios' success has more to do with his political acumen, his capacity of assessing the (lack of) strength of his position and using the political resources available to him. He was not shy of granting significant power to key agents in order to remain in power, even at the cost of being found wanting as a proper man according to Byzantine gender roles, as in the case of the concessions he granted many women of the court, such as Maria of Alania and his mother, Anna Dalassene. Alexios knew when to grant extraordinary power as much as he knew when to take it back without harming his position. Yet his political calculations were sometimes not exact, resulting in increased opposition and internal destabilization of his regime. However, in the long-term, he was undoubtedly successful.

Alexios I did not suffer any large-scale military rebellion, which was common in the period before his reign. There are reasons for this development. First, at least before old age and physical disabilities became a hindrance, Alexios took the lead role as field commander of the Byzantine armies. Since Basileios II, this seemed to be a very effective way of preventing large-scale civil wars. Early in his reign, Basileios decided to take the leading role in the war efforts, which was held for decades by members of aristocratic families Skleros and Phokas. They reacted to losing command by rebelling against the emperor with strong support from wide sectors of the Byzantine army. After almost being defeated, Basileios crushed this rebellion and confirmed his supremacy

over the military, which allowed him to keep a strong grip on the imperial power. The direct military leadership was also translated in the absence of civil wars for his successors. The large military uprising happened during the reign of emperors who remained in Constantinople and assigned to others the leadership of the army. The “military” emperors could face provincial insurrections that were moved either by claims of regional autonomy or dissatisfactions with tributes, but none of them had to face any open wide-scale military rebellion that threatened their position as emperors. This seemed to be also the case with Alexios. Moreover, the highest posts of the army were reserved for the emperor’s parents and supporters, leaving only the second echelon posts for the rest of the aristocracy. Yet these positions still allowed the exercise of political influence over the soldiers, theoretically creating fertile soil for military rebellions. However, the changes in the Byzantine army during the reign of Alexios I abolished these conditions. The defeat in Manzikert and the following military setbacks in the reign of Alexios I decimated the Byzantine native forces from which the members of the aristocracy sought their support for uprisings. The reconstitution of the armed forces by Alexios was based on two sources: the private retinues of the allied families and foreign mercenaries, such as hired Normans, Paulicians established in Thracia or defeated Petchenegs settled in the Balkans.² Consequently, the army officials who were not part of the Komnenian *establishment* were pressed between a high officialdom composed of the emperor’s relatives and the soldiers directly linked with the emperor. The only remaining possibility of deposing Alexios was to strike him from within, through murder conspiracies.

The second cause for the small number and size of military rebellion was the cooptation of the group of aristocratic lineages from Adrianople. They were the only probable source of large-scale military rebellion during Alexios I’s reign, for the Western *tagmata* based in Macedonia survived relatively intact from the sequence of defeats and became the kernel of the Byzantine army at the end of the 11th century. Their importance in this period is reflected in the rebellion of Alexios Komnenos. On this occasion, he had the Western *tagmata* under his order, leaving Nikephoros III and his supporters virtually powerless and incapable of a possible reaction. They could only rely on the imperial personal guards, the Varangian guard and the Chomatenes. Although the command over the Western troops – the title *domestikos* of the West – was

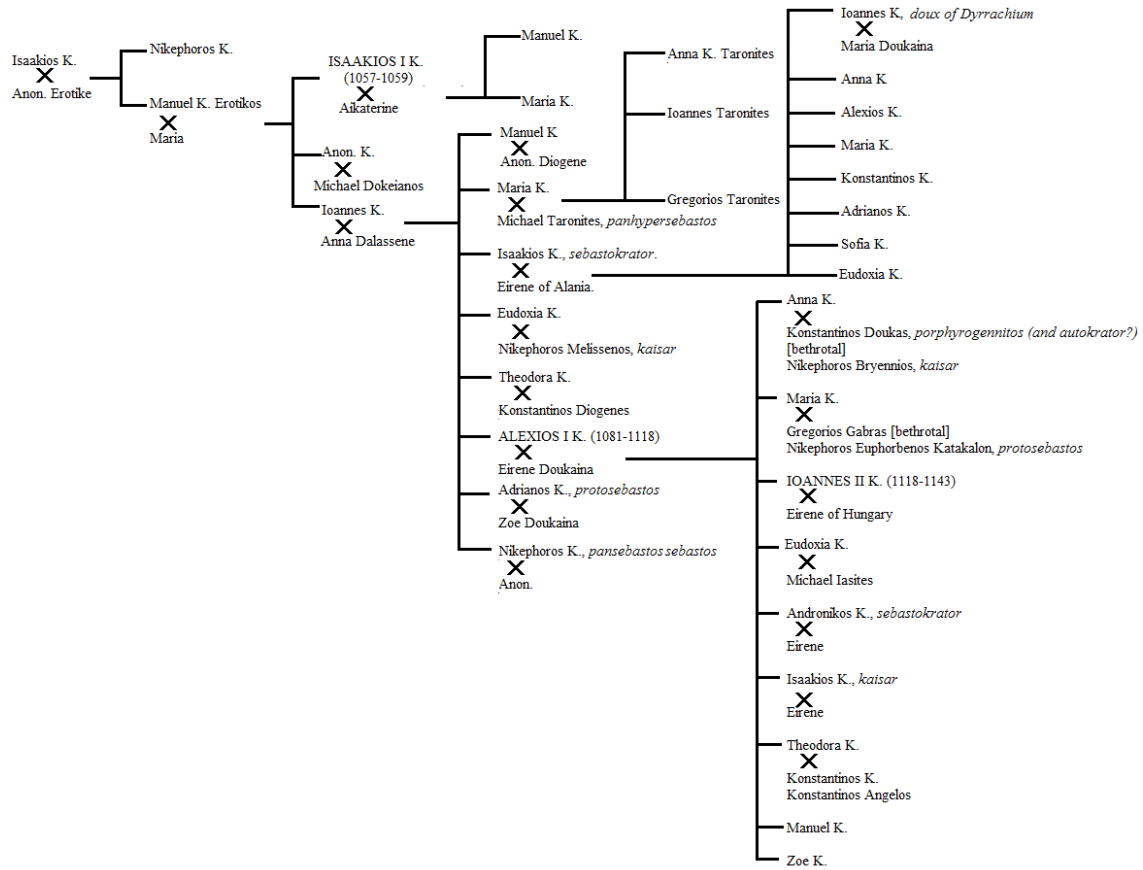
² Birkenmeier, *The Development*, pp. 56–84, 139–182; Haldon, *Warfare*, pp. 93–95.

removed from the aristocracy of Adrianople because of Nikephoros Bryennios' rebellion in 1078, the connection between the Thracian elite and the local soldiers undoubtedly resisted. Moreover, the Thracian population harbored grudges against Alexios Komnenos, for he had defeated Nikephoros Bryennios, leading to his fall and blinding. Consequently, Alexios I made great and successful efforts to approach this sector of the aristocracy, connecting it with his own family through marriages.

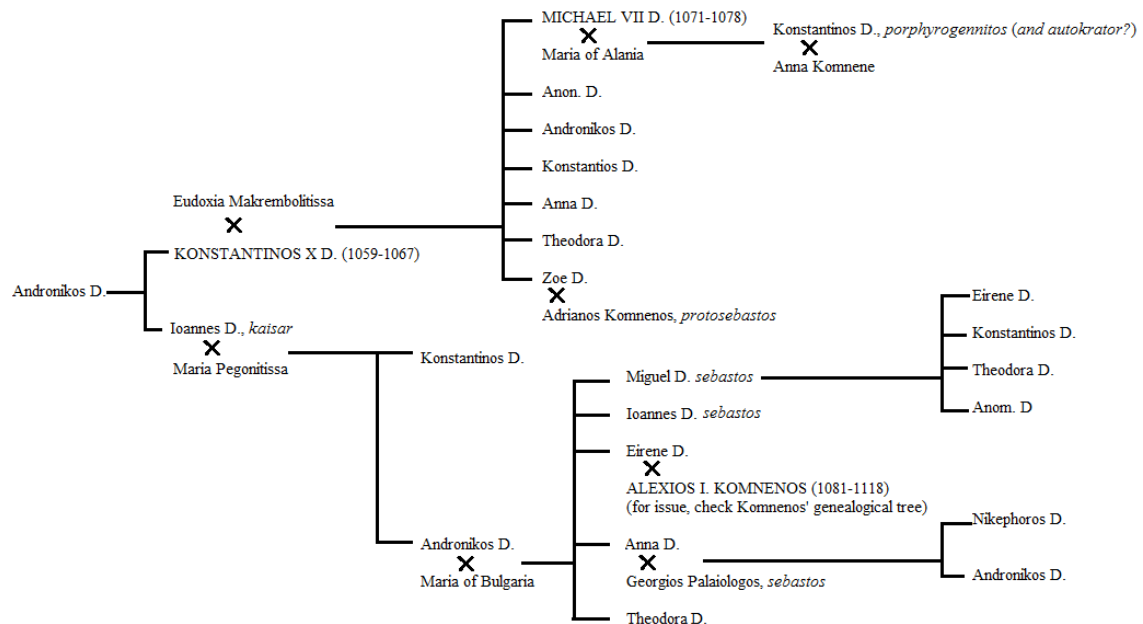
As few emperors had before him, Alexios I knew how to work his image. He made efforts to conquer the favor of the people of Constantinople, exploring possible tensions between the populace and the city elite. By exposing the heretical connections of the aristocratic houses of Constantinople through spectacular trials, such as those against Ioannes Italos and the Bogomils, the emperor managed to attract the attention of the urban masses, get them on his side and unleash them against the urban elite, who disapproved of Alexios' actions and of his rule in general terms as well as supported oppositional movements against him. The reform and the new inauguration of the *orphanotropheion* was a further effort to establish a direct connection with the urban crowd. Although this strategy proved itself to be successful in the following reigns of his son and grandson, it was left incomplete at the end of Alexios' reign. The reason was that the people of the city did not entirely trust the emperors. The senators were not the only target of the violence of Alexios' troops on the occasion of his seizure of power and the trauma caused by this event was still fresh in the memory of the inhabitants when the Crusaders stood before the walls of Constantinople fifteen years after Alexios' coup.

Appendix: the Genealogical Tree of the Families Doukas and Komnenos from their First Known Member to 1118

1. The family Komnenos up to 1118 (adapted from Varzos, *Ἡ γενεαλογία τῶν Κομνηνῶν*)



2. The family Doukas up to 1118 (adapted from Polemis, *The Doukai*)



Abbreviations

This list below was based on the abbreviations provided by *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* and *Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine publications*

AB	Analecta Bollandiana
AIPHOS	Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves
Anna Komnene, Alexiad	Reinsch, Diether Roderisch/ Kambylis, Athanasios (ed.), <i>Annae Comnenae Alexias</i> . 2 Vol. (CFHB 40), Berlin, New York 2001. Reinsch, Diether Roderisch (tr.), <i>Anna Komnene Alexias</i> , Cologne 1996. Sewters, E.R.A., <i>Anna Komnene Alexiad</i> . Revised with introduction and notes by Peter Frankopan, London 2009.
BBOM	Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Monographs
BCH	Bulletin de correspondance hellénique
BF	Byzantinische Forschungen
BMGS	Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies
BSI	Byzantinoslavica
BZ	Byzantinische Zeitschrift
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
CSHB	Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae
Dölger/ Wirth, Regesten	Dölger, Franz, <i>Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565 – 1453</i> . Vol. 2: <i>Regesten von 1025–1204</i> . Second extended and corrected edition by Peter Wirth, Munich 1995.
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
DOML	Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library
GRBS	Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies
Grumel/ Darrouzès, Regestes	Grumel, Venance, <i>Regestes des Actes du Patriarcat de Constantinople</i> . Vol. 1: <i>Les Actes des Patriarches</i> . Fasc. II and III: <i>Les Regestes de 715 a 1206</i> . 2nd edition revised by Jean Darrouzès, Paris 1989.
Ioannes Skylitzes, Synopsis Historion	Thurn, Hans (ed.), <i>Ioannis Scylitzae Synopsis Historiarum</i> (CFHB 5), Berlin 1973. Wortley, John (tr.), <i>John Skylitzes. A Synopsis of Byzantine History, 811–1057</i> . Introduction and comments by Jean-Claude Cheynet and Bernard Flusin, Cambridge 2010.

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- Jeffreys, PBW
 Jeffreys, Elizabeth et ali, Prosopography of the Byzantine World, 2016, London 2017. URL: <http://pbw2016.kdl.kcl.ac.uk>
- JHS
 Journal of Hellenic Studies
- JMedHist
 Journal of Medieval History
- JÖB
 Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik
- Kazhdan, ODB
 Kazhdan, Alexander (ed.), Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium. 3 vol., New York, Oxford 1991.
- Kekaumenos, Consilia et Narrationes
 Roueché, Charlotte (ed.), Kekaumenos, Consilia et Narrationes (SAWS edition, 2013).
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- LeMa
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- LThK
 Kasper, Walter et ali (ed.), Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche. 11 Vol., Freiburg, Basel, Rome, Vienna 1994.
- Matthew of Edessa, Patmowt'iwñ
 Doustorian, Ara Edmond (tr.), Armenia and the Crusades, Tenth to Twelfth Centuries. The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa. Lanham, New York, London 1993.
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 Reinsch, Diether Roderisch (ed.), Michaelis Pseli Chronographia. 2 Vol. (Millenium Studies 51), Berlin, Boston 2014.
 Reinsch, Diether Roderisch (tr.), Leben der byzantinischen Kaiser, Berlin 2015.

Michael the Syrian, Chronicle	Chabot, J.-B. (ed.), <i>Chronique de Michel le Syrien, patriarche Jacobite d'Antioche (1166 – 1199)</i> , vol. 3, Bruxelles 1905.
MiscByzMonac	Miscellanea Byzantina Monacensia
Nicholas Kataskepenos, La Vie	Sargologos, Étienne (ed., tr.), <i>La Vie de Saint Cyrille le Philéote, moine byzantine († 1110)</i> (Subsidia Hagiographica 39), Bruxelles 1964.
Nikephoros Bryennios, Hyle Historias	Gautier, Paul (ed., tr.), <i>Nicephori Bryenni Historiarum Libri Quattuor</i> (CFHB 9), Bruxelles 1975.
Niketas Choniates, Chronike Diegesis	Van Dieten, Jan-Louis (ed.), <i>Nicetae Choniatae Historia</i> . 2 Vol. (CFHB 11), Berlin 1975. Grabler, Franz (tr.), <i>Die Krone der Komnenen. Die Regierungszeit der Kaiser Joannes und Manuel Komnenos (1118 – 1180) aus dem Geschichtswerk des Niketas Choniates</i> (Byzantinische Geschichtsschreiber 7), Graz, Vienna, Cologne 1958. Magoulias, Harry J. (tr.), <i>O City of Byzantium, the Annals of Niketas Choniates</i> (Byzantine Texts in Translation), Detroit 1984.
OCP	Orientalia Christiana Periodica
Orderic Vitalis, The Ecclesiastical History	Chibnall, Marjorie (ed., tr.), <i>The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis</i> . 6 Vol., Oxford 1978.
PmbZ	Lilie, Ralph-Johannes/ Ludwig, Claudia/Zielke, Beate/ Pratsch, Thomas et ali. (ed.), <i>Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit. Nach Vorarbeiten F. Winkelmanns</i> . 8 Vol., Berlin, New York 1998–2013.
REB	Revue des études byzantines
SPBS	Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies
Skylitzes Continuatus	Tsolakis, Eudoxos T. (ed.), <i>Ἡ συνέχεια τῆς χρονολογίας τοῦ Ἰωάννου Σκυλίτη</i> , Thessaloniki 1968.
StPB	Studia Patristica et Byzantina
Theophanes Confessor, Chronographia	Boor, Carl de (ed.), <i>Theophanis Chronographia</i> . Leipzig 1883 [repr. Olms 1963]. Turtledove, Harry (tr.), <i>The Chronicle of Theophanes. An English Translation of Anni Mundi 6095–6305 (a.d. 602–813)</i> , Philadelphia 1982

TM
ZRVI

Travaux et mémoires
Zbornik radova Vizantološkog instituta, Srpska
akademija nauka

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