

# *Anna Comneno, the Alexiad and the First Crusade*

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Published Version

France, J. (1984) Anna Comneno, the Alexiad and the First Crusade. Reading Medieval Studies, X. pp. 20-38. ISSN 0950-3129 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/85094/>

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Publisher: University of Reading

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Anna Comnena, the Alexiad and the First Crusade<sup>1</sup>

By her own account Anna Comnena began to write the Alexiad shortly after the death of her husband, Nicephoros Bryennios, in 1137. He had begun a life of Alexius, known to us as the Hyle, but had taken it no further than the end of the reign of Nicephoros Botaniates in March 1081. This inspired Anna to continue the unfinished life of her father.<sup>2</sup> Some 30 years after the death of Alexius, she tells us that she was still preparing the work.<sup>3</sup> Those parts of Books X and XI which deal with the First Crusade were therefore written at least 40 years after the events they describe. We know that Anna was born on 1 December 1083<sup>4</sup> so she was only thirteen when the crusade came to Constantinople in 1096-97. In view of these facts it is difficult to regard her as an eye-witness even for those events which took place in and around Constantinople during the First Crusade.<sup>5</sup> Anna is at pains to stress her involvement in public affairs even at a very tender age,<sup>6</sup> but it seems likely that her childhood recollections add no more than a certain vividness to accounts of events which, essentially, she derived from other sources. Her poor dating is also probably evidence of her distance from events. Anna makes a point of emphasising the limitations of her sources. On the death of her father she had intrigued unsuccessfully to place her husband, Nicephoros Bryennios, on the throne in place of her brother John: this is why John II Comnenus (1118-1143) imprisoned Anna in the Theotokos Kecharitomenae in western Asia Minor.<sup>7</sup> Because of this she declares: 'For thirty years now ... I have not seen, I have not spoken to a friend of my father', and goes on to tell us that she obtained information only from humble men, veterans who had entered the monastic life. She says that she used these accounts to supplement and correct her own memories and writings, and stories she had heard in the family.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand Anna seems to have been freer to collect evidence after the death of her brother, the Emperor John, in 1143 for she also tells us: 'there are men still alive today who knew my father and tell me of his deeds. They have, in fact, made a not inconsiderable contribution to the history ...'.<sup>9</sup> Further, both Buckler and Chalandon agree that Anna must have been able to use the Imperial Archives because she reproduces documents, some of which fall within the area we are concerned with here.<sup>10</sup> The actual text of the letters of Hugh Magnus as given by Anna seems rather unlikely, but there can be little doubt that letters were exchanged.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand the exchange of letters with Bohemond in 1103 and the instruction to St. Gilles in 1099 have the ring of truth, while the text of the Treaty of Devol is undoubtedly accurate.<sup>12</sup> Anna, therefore, probably had access to the imperial archives; by her own account she was able to draw upon the testimony of men of varying degrees; she was able to use her own earlier (but unspecified) writings; and above all she was able to draw upon the recollections of the Imperial family, especially her husband. All this gives Anna's work great authority for the period of the First Crusade,

although she cannot be regarded as an eye-witness to the events. However, despite her protestations to the contrary,<sup>13</sup> she did favour her father. Her entire account of the crusade is coloured by her anxiety to defend her father from the charge of oath-breaking, a charge which had the gravest political implications for Alexius and for the Byzantine Empire, and which was still a living issue at the time she wrote. Alexius and the Latin princes who led the crusade made an agreement upon oath in the spring of 1097, whose detailed terms are not known to us. By virtue of that agreement Alexius claimed that the Latins should have restored Antioch to him when it fell in June 1098, but Bohemond, who controlled the city, was able to claim that Alexius had broken the agreement, thereby destroying his obligation to the emperor. Some forty years later, when Anna was writing, John II Comnenus was still trying to recover Antioch, and his son, Manuel, was to spend much time on the same objective.

It is significant of Anna's general attitude to the Latins that the crusade is introduced as one amongst the many troubles which beset the empire at this time.<sup>14</sup> She implies that Alexius was taken totally by surprise. There is no hint that her father might have asked for aid at the Council of Piacenza as he almost certainly did,<sup>15</sup> while the Council of Clermont is never mentioned. She can hardly be blamed for ignorance of Clermont for she wrote at least forty years after it met, and by that time Albert of Aix, himself a westerner, seems to have been uncertain of its importance.<sup>16</sup> Her silence on Piacenza is more suspect, for she had access to the Imperial archives, and this may well represent a discreet suppression. There is some evidence in the *Alexiad* that Alexius was forewarned of the coming of the crusaders. By Anna's own account Alexius implemented thoughtful policies to control the barbarians crossing his empire,<sup>17</sup> while he had worked out the policy of making the Latin leaders become his vassals in plenty of time for the arrival of Hugh Maunus, who, it may be added, had written to him twice in advance of his coming.<sup>18</sup> Writers have correctly observed the tone of civilised contempt for mere barbarians with which Anna first speaks of the crusaders, but amongst the generalised abuse which she showers upon them, here, at the very beginning of the story, note one specific charge, that of oath-breaking. This deplorable tendency to perjury is carefully presented as arising from the very character of the Latins. It is a theme which she cultivates assiduously in the early stages of the *Alexiad*, and which totally dominates the work in so far as it is concerned with the crusade. As part of her campaign to blame the Latins for all that went wrong, it was vital to blacken the reputation of Bohemond, the arch-villain who later seized Antioch from Alexius contrary to his oath. Long before Bohemond actually appears in the story, he is carefully introduced and villified. The simplicity of the poor on the 'People's Crusade' is contrasted with the malevolence of Bohemond whose true purpose was to seize Constantinople itself; this charge is repeated twice.<sup>19</sup> His coming is foreshadowed,<sup>20</sup>

while it is alleged that he had bound the other leaders together in a conspiracy against the Empire.<sup>21</sup> Even minor leaders prevaricate about taking an oath to Alexius because they await the arrival of Bohemond.<sup>22</sup> All this is done before Bohemond himself comes into the story with the arrival of his army at Avlona. Of course it does, in part, reflect contemporary Byzantine fear of Bohemond who, only ten years before, had been party to an effort to destroy the Byzantine empire, but its real purpose is to prepare the way for his role in the drama of oath-breaking which dominates Anna's account. One vital purpose of all this anticipation was to explain and discredit Bohemond's initial friendliness towards the empire. On this the western sources are explicit. The Anonymus tells us that almost as soon as he had landed Bohemond ordered his troops to behave well, warning 'them all to be courteous and refrain from plundering that land, which belonged to the Christians', and he goes on to mention other occasions when Bohemond restrained his army and treated the local people well.<sup>23</sup> Raymond of Aguilers, no friend of the Normans of South Italy, makes it quite clear that Bohemond sided with Alexius in his quarrel with the Count of Toulouse at Constantinople.<sup>24</sup> Anna was forced to admit that Bohemond first pursued a policy of friendship, but she was able to explain it away as mere pretence arising from his weak position; an explanation for which she has very adequately prepared us: 'Knowing that he himself was not of noble descent, with no great military following because of his lack of resources, he wished to win the emperor's goodwill, but at the same time to conceal his own hostile intentions against him'.<sup>25</sup> The judgement on the size of Bohemond's following probably reflects knowledge of his difficult position in South Italy at this time. What it is important to recognise at this point is that Bohemond has been carefully introduced to us as a man not to be trusted, and that this characteristic is fixed upon all the Latin leaders, partly as springing from character and partly from association with the arch-villain and great oathbreaker.

This theme of the Franks, and above all Bohemond, as barbarian oath-breakers, untrustworthy in the extreme, is deliberately woven into Anna's account of the origins and early stages of the First Crusade. This section of the account reveals some of the *Alexiad's* strengths and weaknesses as a source. Anna knew little of events in the West. She was ignorant of Clermont and assumed that Peter the Hermit had begun the Crusade.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, Anna provides us with an account of the People's Crusade which is very full and largely compatible with Latin accounts.<sup>27</sup> However, there is a curious spottiness about this section of the story: it is odd that she makes no reference to the devastation of imperial territory by some of the western armies on their way to Constantinople.<sup>28</sup> Moreover Anna assumes that all the crusader armies came to Constantinople after crossing the Adriatic: she makes a general statement to this effect and later specifically tells us that Godfrey crossed the Adriatic, though we know that he followed a different route.<sup>29</sup> The contrast

between notably accurate and detailed accounts, and quite frequent ignorance or even misinformation, probably springs from the fact that Anna was writing long after the events she describes and was therefore dependent on the accounts of others in whatever form they came to her. Anna's belief that all the armies came across the Adriatic may well be her own inference from the sources she had before her. Anna mentions by name the Duke of Dyrrachium, her cousin John son of Isaac the Sebastocrator, and Nicholas Mavrocatalon, commander of the Adriatic fleet.<sup>30</sup> She shows herself well informed about the instructions they received regarding the arrangements to meet the Latin forces, and gives a detailed account of their reception of Hugh of Vermandois. Shortly after, we have a vivid and circumstantial story of the fighting at sea between the Byzantine Marianus and a Frankish warrior priest,<sup>31</sup> which must have come from an eyewitness. It seems reasonable to infer that Anna either saw official reports, or heard from her cousin John about these events, and on the basis of these particular stories drew the general conclusion that all the barbarians came via the Adriatic. All this suggests that we should treat Anna's account of the events of the First Crusade with some caution, remembering above all that she was not an eyewitness, and that she was writing with hindsight.

As the crusader armies approached Constantinople they presented the emperor Alexius with a complex of problems. He had to cope with large numbers of nominally friendly troops who needed to be policed and fed.<sup>32</sup> These armies, which were planning to concentrate at Constantinople, included Normans, the blood enemies of the Byzantine empire. However, it was imperative that Alexius treat the crusaders in a friendly way, for whatever Urban II's precise intentions were in launching the crusade, it seems certain that he intended to help the Byzantine empire. Even Anna Comnena admits that many of the crusaders had come with the best of intentions, while the story of the plague of locusts which ate only the vines does admit the moral worth of the western armies.<sup>33</sup> The fact was that Christendom was still one, and that the spirit of Christian brotherhood still meant something.<sup>34</sup> Further, Alexius was determined that his empire should profit from this western incursion, a point that Anna makes amply clear. In the coming confrontation at Constantinople Alexius held most of the cards for each crusader army arrived separately, and all depended on him for supplies, transport across the Bosphorus, military help and guidance. On the other hand the very presence of their turbulent armies was a terror to the empire and Alexius may have lacked troops because his army was dispersed to meet many threats,<sup>35</sup> while the religious nature of their undertaking meant that Alexius had to appear to treat them well. Anna portrays Alexius trying to deal with each major leader of the crusade in isolation, seeking to make each his vassal. The unfortunate Hugh of Vermandois was shipwrecked then isolated from any contact with other westerners in honourable imprisonment until he had sworn an oath to Alexius

'to become his liegeman and take the customary oath of the Latins'.<sup>36</sup> Greater difficulties arose with the arrival at Constantinople of Godfrey of Bouillon and his army on 23 December 1096.<sup>37</sup> Anna ascribes his reluctance to cross the Bosphorus to his being in league with Bohemond, but we should see this in the light of what has been said about her prejudices. However, the measures which she says Alexius took to bring Godfrey to heel seem predictable: he was isolated, supplies were cut, an effort was made to suborn his subordinate commanders, Hugh of Vermandois was employed to try and persuade him, and military force was used, though only after much provocation. The account of the troubles of the Lorraine army is in general compatible with what we know from western sources. Finally, in late January,<sup>38</sup> Godfrey '... came to the emperor and swore an oath as he was directed that whatever cities, countries or forests he might in future subdue, which had in the first place belonged to the Roman Empire, he would hand over to the officer appointed by the emperor for this very purpose'.<sup>39</sup> This appears at first sight to be a very different oath to that extracted from Hugh of Vermandois. Nothing is specifically said of the obscure Count Raoul taking an oath, but it is at least implied that he came to obedience in the end.<sup>40</sup> In the case of the sundry and unspecified leaders who arrived next, whom Anna casually and inaccurately describes as 'kings, dukes and counts, and even bishops',<sup>41</sup> it is absolutely clear that they became sworn vassals of the emperor, though nothing is said of returning cities or towns. However, Godfrey came back to Constantinople specifically to witness their oath-taking, so it seems unlikely that what they swore was markedly different from the oath he had taken.

It is not surprising that Anna devotes much time to the negotiations between Alexius and Bohemond.<sup>42</sup> Her theme throughout is that Bohemond was a liar, willing to become the vassal of the emperor only for what he could get out of the relationship, 'for he had neither illustrious ancestors nor great wealth (hence his forces were not strong - only a moderate number of Celtic followers). In any case, Bohemond was by nature a liar.' The story of his fear of poisoned meat (which may or may not be true) is used to portray him as treacherous even to his followers, while he is pictured as perversely greedy for the presents of the emperor. On the surface, however, Bohemond and Alexius got on well and this impression is confirmed by the western sources: the *Gesta Francorum* tell us that Bohemond swore an oath, while Raymond of Aguilers shows Bohemond siding with Alexius in his quarrel with the Count of Toulouse.<sup>43</sup> However, the most interesting part of Anna's account is her story that Bohemond asked to be made 'Domestic of the East', a position which apparently would have given him command over the other western leaders.<sup>44</sup> Alexius demurred but did not refuse outright, suggesting that even such a post might be Bohemond's if he proved faithful. It is unlikely that Anna invented this incident, and it seems a little curious that she did not suppress it, but perhaps she felt that it was necessary to be very truthful in the interests of making it quite clear that Bohemond had received no promise from the emperor which

could conceivably have given warrant for his seizure of Antioch. It is unlikely, as Chalandon thinks,<sup>45</sup> that Alexius offered Bohemond a principality at Antioch, but it is possible that these negotiations formed the basis of the Gesta story that Alexius promised such a principality to Bohemond in return for his oath.<sup>46</sup>

The last of the Latin leaders who Anna mentions is Raymond of St-Gilles, Count of Toulouse, 'Isangeles', who from the first is portrayed as a friend of the emperor: 'For one of them, Raymond the Count of St-Gilles, Alexius had a deep affection'.<sup>47</sup> Anna goes on to tell us that her father and the count became such good friends that Raymond stayed for a while at Constantinople after the other leaders had left, and became privy to all the emperor's fears about Bohemond. What Anna gives us is a summary of 'many conversations' in the course of which an understanding appears to have grown between the two men. It must be noted that she never says that Raymond took the oath to become a vassal of her father. This appears to confirm the testimony of both the Gesta and the work of Raymond of Aguilers which tell us that Raymond refused the oath of homage, but eventually offered satisfactory assurances for the security of the emperor and his lands.<sup>48</sup> Anna's account of the friendship between the count and her father contrasts sharply with the violent quarrel between them reported by Latin sources which tell us that Raymond refused homage because he had come to fight for the Lord and no other, and sought revenge when he heard that his ill-disciplined army had been scattered by the imperial police: Raymond of Aguilers reports that Bohemond supported the emperor in this quarrel and concludes by saying that because the count had refused homage, Alexius gave him a few presents.<sup>49</sup> Commentators have assumed that Raymond of Aguilers, who was bitterly anti-Byzantine, deliberately omitted any reference to the new friendship between the count and emperor which developed after the initial misunderstanding, while Anna, who knew that Raymond became a loyal ally of Alexius in the later stages of the crusade and beyond, chose to omit any reference to the quarrel that began the relationship. Some have even spoken of a Greco-Provençal alliance dating from this time.<sup>50</sup> This seems to be a gross overstatement, for the Latin sources do not portray Raymond as a defender of imperial rights (as distinct from an enemy of Bohemond) until November 1098;<sup>51</sup> Anna herself never mentions any resistance by the count to Bohemond's seizure of Antioch.<sup>52</sup> If we discount Anna's lavish praise of St-Gilles and her black-guarding of Bohemond as being the results of hindsight, and if we bear in mind the Latin accounts of the bitterness of the count towards Alexius, what Anna actually describes to us is her father carefully and tentatively cultivating two prickly western leaders, neither of whom was very well-inclined to the Byzantines, but either of whom might well choose to throw in his lot with him if circumstances were right. Of the two, Bohemond was undoubtedly the more willing, though at a price, while the count was the more cautious. The

subsequent pattern of friendship and enmities arose through changing circumstances and the way in which these two leaders exploited them. One cannot help wondering whether Alexius tried to cultivate others besides the Count and Bohemond. Stephen of Blois certainly enjoyed good relations with him. Perhaps Anna selected these two because of their importance for the future.

But the most interesting problem which arose from Anna's account of the negotiations between the western leaders and the emperor is the precise nature of the agreements which were concluded, for at a later date each side was to accuse the other of oath-breaking. So far we have seen that Anna would have us believe that the crusader leaders became the vassals of the emperor, and swore to return to him any former territories of the Byzantine empire which they captured: this and no more is the substance of the agreements recorded in the *Alexiad*. Yet there are hints in Anna's account that something more than this was agreed. At the very end of Book X and at the beginning of Book XI, Anna stresses that Alexius would have liked to join the Franks, while in the very first paragraph of Book XI she tells us that the Franks who had landed in Asia Minor expected 'the Emperor to come with Isangeles' though they expected only St-Gilles to go to Nicaea with them. In the account of the siege of Nicaea, Anna is brutally frank about her father's *realpolitik*, his intention to use the westerners' strength for his own profit. There is no doubt that Alexius was entitled to have Nicaea returned to him, but the way in which he kept his western allies in the dark about negotiations with the enemy, and even in the end prepared them for an attack which served only his own ends, was hardly in the spirit of christian cooperation.<sup>53</sup> The outline of Anna's account of the siege of Nicaea here is comparable to that given by the Latin chronicles, and in particular the story of the undermining of the Gonates tower seems to reflect a similar incident narrated by Raymond of Aguilers and the Anonymous.<sup>54</sup> In her account of the attempt by the Sultan to lift the siege of Nicaea, Anna differs from the western sources in suggesting that battles were fought on two separate days, but it must be admitted that the latter are far from unanimous in their stories of the battle.<sup>55</sup> The chief value of Anna's account is that it gives a totally different perspective of the siege of Nicaea. Alexius is portrayed as deeply distrustful of the Franks but anxious to profit from their power. Anna praises him for what is, in the end, duplicity towards his friends and allies. Anna exaggerates the degree of military support which he provided. The story of the last interview at Pelecanus in which Alexius gave presents and took oaths from those who had not already sworn them<sup>56</sup> marks the end of Anna's coherent and connected account of the crusade. Thereafter all she reports of value is a series of disconnected incidents, strung together by ignorance, speculation and misinformation. The *Alexiad*'s value as a source for the First Crusade diminishes as the army gets further and further from Constantinople. What we are told, however, and almost all of what is singled out as important, relates



to the question of the oaths taken at Constantinople.

There is no account, as such, of the siege of Antioch, but we are told immediately of the coming of Kerbogah to relieve Antioch, though this did not occur until the end of the siege. Then we hear of Bohemond's intrigue with an Armenian<sup>57</sup> who promised to betray Antioch to him. Anna tells us that, armed with this secret, Bohemond tricked the imperial representative on the crusade, Taticius, into leaving the army. Anna was naturally concerned to present a Byzantine view blaming Bohemond for the flight of Taticius, because his departure could be presented as part of the Byzantine 'desertion' of the crusade. In fact her story that Bohemond told Taticius of a plot against him by the other leaders may have truth in it, but it is only credible if we accept that anti-Byzantine feeling was growing generally in the army.<sup>58</sup> Anna then shows us Bohemond, once he had got rid of Taticius, gaining a promise of the city for himself at any rate until such time as another imperial representative arrived, from the other Frankish leaders who were terrified by the impending arrival of Kerbogah.<sup>59</sup> This is a travesty of events, for Taticius fled the camp in February 1098 at a time when the army had heard news of an attempt to relieve the city by Ridwan of Aleppo, while it was not until late May that Bohemond's colleagues promised him the city, though only, as the Anonymous tells us: 'on condition that if the emperor come to our aid and fulfil all the obligations which he promised and vowed, we will return the city to him as it is right to do'.<sup>60</sup> Anna may have been poorly informed of the events of the first siege of Antioch, so what she gives us is probably surmise centering on the events which interested her, those relative to the oath. It is interesting that she and the Anonymous are in near agreement about the conditional nature of the promise made by the other leaders to Bohemond. The story of the second siege of Antioch is little more than an outline in which considerable credit is given to Bohemond,<sup>61</sup> presumably to explain why he was in the end given Antioch. The only other incident about which she goes into any detail is the finding of what she calls 'The Holy Nail',<sup>62</sup> but what the Latin sources clearly regard as the Holy Lance. The discrepancy may be explained in terms of Anna's desire to be tactful to the Count of St-Gilles who was the upholder of this relic and her knowledge that the true Holy Lance was one of the relics at Constantinople. To describe the find as a 'Holy Nail' allowed the Count the finding of a major relic without questioning the Holy Lance at Constantinople.<sup>63</sup>

With the exception of the important account of events at Philomelium the remainder of Anna's account of the First Crusade is pretty useless. It is a very thin outline, and in it Anna confuses Godfrey of Bouillon's victory over the Egyptians at Ascalon on 12 August 1099 with the defeat of Baldwin I on 17 May 1102 at the second battle of Ramleh.<sup>64</sup> These events were of little interest to Anna who was happy to pass them over without any attempt at clarification because they were not related to the question of the oath.

Anna is naturally much more interested in the doings of her father and is concerned with the crusade really only in so far as it affected him. The advance of the Franks into Turkish territory enabled Alexius, as Anna says, to regain substantial sections of western Asia Minor, Ionia and Phrygia.<sup>65</sup> These campaigns had not ended, she tells us, when Alexius set out with his army to help the Franks in Antioch, and got as far as Philomelium.<sup>66</sup> We have already noted in connection with the siege of Nicaea that Anna insists upon Alexius's anxiety to go to the aid of the Franks (an anxiety which never impelled him to join them). At Philomelium Anna emphasises her father's anxiety to help the Franks, and tells us that the gloomy account of their situation given by William of Grandmesnil, Stephen of Blois and Peter of the Alps, all of whom had fled from Antioch, made him 'all the more anxious to hurry to their aid'. However, news arrived of another enemy army in the field, led by Ishmael, son of the Sultan of Khorosan, and this forced Alexius to change his mind. The apologetic note of this account is quite unmistakable, for Anna spends a great deal of time rehashing the reasons why Alexius did not go to Antioch, even dragging up the unstable character of the Franks, a theme we have met before at the very beginning of her account of the First Crusade.<sup>67</sup> The reason for all this justification is clear. After the crusade Alexius wrote to Bohemond demanding that he return Antioch which he held in defiance of his oath: Bohemond replied that Taticius had fled and that Alexius had broken his oath by not following them with an army of his own.<sup>68</sup> News of Alexius's 'desertion' at Philomelium and the failure to return of Hugh of Vermandois in July 1098, who was sent by the leaders to persuade the emperor 'to come and take over the city and fulfill the obligations which he had undertaken towards them',<sup>69</sup> were the factors which made possible Bohemond's acquisition of Antioch in November 1098. It is apparent from this statement in the *Gesta* that the leaders of the crusade saw their agreement with Alexius in a light rather different to that thrown on them by Anna who presents them simply as oaths of vassalage to Alexius. The charge of oath-breaking underlay the long conflict over Antioch which was to dominate Byzantine-Crusader relations in the twelfth century. The substance of the oaths which both sides alleged to have been broken has never been elucidated satisfactorily.

The leaders of the crusade handed Antioch to Bohemond only reluctantly, and in the face of the opposition of Raymond of Toulouse. The reluctance sprang from some fear of perjury, but more importantly they recognised that the defection of Bohemond from the expedition, and the alienation of Raymond of Toulouse, might destroy the whole undertaking.<sup>70</sup> However, this *de facto* breaking of the oath was made possible by what seem to have been regarded as a long series of 'betrayals' by the Byzantines. In February, Taticius, imperial representative on the crusade, had left the army at a moment of crisis when they were starving and when an enemy force was expected.

Although there is evidence that some food supplies continued to come from imperial Cyprus, the army seems to have fed itself and fought its own battles without Byzantine help. Anna's rather arbitrary summary of events at Antioch ignores these factors. It is very difficult to discover what the terms of the oath, or, perhaps, if there was one, some related agreement, actually were. Both sides had a vested interest in vagueness. In a famous letter to his wife, probably written at the end of the siege of Nicaea, Stephen of Blois presents the emperor treating him as an equal and makes no mention of the oath, while a letter of Anselm of Ribemont written at the siege of Antioch simply evades the whole question of events at Constantinople.<sup>71</sup> An official letter to the west from all the crusading leaders, dating from early in the siege of Antioch, makes no mention of an oath of homage, but says that a peace had been concluded between themselves and the emperor under which the latter had undertaken not to hinder pilgrims passing through his lands: it should be stressed however that the letter was seeking recruits from the west and so may have stressed this particular aspect of the agreement.<sup>72</sup> The Anonymous admits that the leader of the crusade swore an oath of vassalage to the emperor, but says nothing of the obligations which they undertook, and a great deal about those which he took upon himself: 'The emperor for his part guaranteed good faith and security to all our men, and swore also to come with us, bringing an army and a navy, and faithfully to supply us with provisions both by land and sea, and to take care to restore all those things which we had lost. Moreover, he promised that he would not cause or permit anyone to trouble or vex our pilgrims on the way to the Holy Sepulchre'.<sup>73</sup> The emperor's promise of 'fidem et securitatem' is very reminiscent of the same promise of 'fiducias atque securitatem' reported in the letter of the leaders already mentioned which also stresses the promises to protect pilgrims. It would not be surprising if the emperor promised to give supplies to the army, for we hear mention of these coming from Byzantine Cyprus, while the Anonymous does tell us that Taticius left the crusader army on the pretext of bringing food.<sup>74</sup> The most controversial part of the *Gesta* account is Alexius's promise to lead an army to the aid of the crusaders. If this pledge was actually made, his failure to carry it out would justify Bohemond's later charges, and provide an explanation of why Anna always stresses Alexius's anxiety to aid the crusaders, especially at Philomelium. However, the *Gesta* account must be treated cautiously for it is extremely one-sided, never mentioning the promise made by all the Frankish leaders to restore any former imperial territories which the crusaders might capture.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, the Anonymous was a follower and admirer of Bohemond who may well have used his work, in an edited form, as an apologia.<sup>76</sup> When Raymond of Aguilers tells us of the emperor's demand for homage from St-Gilles, he says that the count refused and demanded that Alexius should go to Jerusalem leading his own army: to this the emperor replied that he could not go because of his pre-occupation with other problems.<sup>77</sup> This dialogue has the ring of truth and Raymond of Aguilers was generally well-

informed about the inner politics of the crusade. It is unlikely in any case that Alexius would ever have committed himself to a campaign in distant Palestine,<sup>78</sup> but Raymond does state very clearly that the crusader leaders did expect Byzantine military aid quite apart from that provided by Taticius. As the army approached Antioch some of the leaders suggested that the army should winter away from the city, awaiting reinforcements from the west and the 'Emperor's forces'; this was successfully opposed by St-Gilles who argued for an immediate close investment of Antioch.<sup>79</sup> However, this does strengthen the idea that Alexius had promised military support for the crusaders, particularly if, as seem likely,<sup>80</sup> Taticius was amongst those who wanted the army to pass the winter away from Antioch.

A tentative but reasonable conclusion would be that the western leaders did become the vassals of Alexius, and did promise to return former imperial possessions (though the temporal and spatial limits are unclear). In return, Alexius promised to help pilgrims passing through his empire and to give them supplies and military help. In the event, each side was able to claim that the other had broken the oath. Our Latin eyewitness accounts never felt seriously obliged to be fair to the Greeks in any case but in their pages we can see resentment against their allies growing: the winter of 1097-98 saw the army suffering from starvation and serious losses. Their position was continually menaced by relief expeditions led by powerful Turkish potentates. In this crisis Taticius deserted them. None of this, of course, was Alexius's doing but when they triumphed they must have felt that the Byzantines had done little to succour them. Then, at some time in the summer of 1098, they seem to have heard of events at Philomelium,<sup>81</sup> and they never received a reply to the embassy to the emperor led by Hugh of Vermandois which called upon Alexius to take possession of Antioch. In these circumstances the crusaders could have felt little obligation to the emperor who had, apparently, deserted them. Further, we should not forget that westerners may have viewed the oath of allegiance differently to Byzantines. In the western experience the oath of homage implied reciprocal duties and in the experience of the crude feudatories on the expedition these would normally have been carried out personally by the contracting parties. It was probably this interpretation of the oath, and the way in which circumstances evolved, that gave force to the accusation that Alexius had not fulfilled his obligations, and had therefore broken the oath. When, in the spring of 1099, Alexius wrote to the crusaders promising to come to their aid, only the Count of St-Gilles was willing: the rest of the army (Bohemond had left by this time) angrily refused to wait for him: 'The Emperor has always done us hurt, has always lied, has always plotted against us'.<sup>82</sup>

Anna Comnena presents us with a Greek view of the oath. She can quite formally make the charge that Bohemond had broken the oath. Her

account stresses the obligations of the Latins towards her father, but conveniently leaves out any reference to his own towards them. She portrays Alexius giving military and logistic support as a matter of grace rather than formal obligation. However, she seems to have been aware of the force of the Latins' argument that Alexius failed to support them. She certainly knew of Taticius' desertion. Because of this she strove to stress the willingness of Alexius to aid the Latins and grossly overstates the role of Taticius's force: 'Taticius' duty would be to help and protect them on all occasions'.<sup>83</sup> She portrays Alexius as all eagerness to support the Latins at Antioch but we must take this with a pinch of salt. Philomelium is close to Antioch-in-Pisidia which the crusader army had left on 31 July 1097: they did not arrive at Antioch until 20 October 1097. It must be conceded that the imperial army could have reached Antioch rather faster than the enormous and heterogeneous force of the Franks. However, the simple facts of geography must lead us to doubt Anna's statement that Alexius was eager to aid the crusaders and perhaps even to doubt whether he had any intention at all of doing so. The importance attached by Greeks and Latins alike to the question of the oath is clearly revealed in the preliminaries which led up to the Treaty of Devol.<sup>84</sup> At the very beginning of the text of the treaty itself Bohemond was made to admit and to reiterate that he broke the oath which he had sworn at Constantinople at the very beginning of the First Crusade.<sup>85</sup>

Anna Comnena cannot be regarded as an eyewitness of the First Crusade. She was writing some forty years after the crusade had passed through Constantinople, so childhood recollections can only have added an occasional vividness to her use of other sources. The *Alexiad* is a life of her father and is very favourable to him. In the passage where she describes the First Crusade, Anna is specifically trying to defend her father against the charge of oath-breaking, and thereby to justify Byzantine policy. The possession of Antioch was a political issue throughout her lifetime and beyond. This basically conditions her treatment of the events of the First Crusade. From the first the Franks are presented as oath-breakers by nature, and amongst them Bohemond is the arch-villain. At Constantinople he is made to appear a master of duplicity, and the fact of his willingness to cooperate with Alexius is clouded over. In deliberate contrast Count Raymond of St-Gilles emerges as the 'goody' amongst the crusaders and his early quarrel with Alexius is quietly forgotten because by the time she wrote, Anna knew that he had later become her father's ally. The siege of Nicaea is dealt with at length, presumably because she happened to have good accounts of it, and could use it to portray her father as playing a major role. It is interesting to note that the duplicity which Anna so condemned in Bohemond is praised in her father who kept his western allies in ignorance of his negotiations with the Turks. Indeed, the section on Alexius and the siege of Nicaea is one of the most revealing in the book. Thereafter Anna concentrates her account almost

entirely on events with a direct bearing on the question of the oath, showing little interest, for example, in the capture of Jerusalem. Anna's account of the First Crusade is very inconsistent - sometimes she is well informed, at other times quite the opposite. This reflects both the limited source material available to her and the way in which she selected information in order to make her case. Anna Comnena was primarily concerned to present her father as a figure of rectitude who had always kept his word to the crusaders. In order to sustain her picture, Anna was obliged to suppress and distort in her account: most particularly we are given a one-sided view of the agreements concluded between the emperor and the leaders at Constantinople, and a grossly exaggerated view of the Byzantine contribution to the crusade and the interest of Alexius in it. In reality Alexius pursued an opportunist policy of profiting from an enterprise of whose ultimate success he must have been sceptical, while at the same time offering the minimum of support. He did not join the Franks in the siege of Nicaea; Anna would have us believe 'even if his presence was unwise, he realised the necessity of giving as much aid to the Kelts as if he were actually with them'.<sup>86</sup> In reality the help he gave was limited. He sent only a small expedition with the crusaders to Antioch, because his main forces were pre-occupied in mopping up the Turks of western Asia Minor in the wake of the crusading success. It is possible that his presence at Philomelium was quite unrelated to any desire to help the Franks, though that is not what Anna would have us believe. Alexius adopted an opportunist policy towards the First Crusade, but the Norman seizure of Antioch in 1098 made it imperative, both for his good name and the needs of the Byzantine Empire, to present this policy in a quite different light and this was what Anna was concerned to do. This is not to criticise Alexius's policy which at the time was perfectly reasonable in the light of his many responsibilities. While his daughter Anna was fond of hindsight, Alexius lacked the gift of divination. Like almost everyone else he underestimated the potential for success of the First Crusade.

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### NOTES

1. There are two easily available English translations of the Alexiad: E.R. Sewter, The Alexiad of Anna Comnena, Harmondsworth 1969; E.A.S. Dawes, The Alexiad of the Princess Anna Comnena, London 1922 (reissued 1967).  
All quotations here will be from Sewter, but references will be made to the Sewter translation (in the form of S + page no.) and the Dawes translation (D + page no.). The limitations of this study, which deals only with Anna's treatment of the First Crusade must be stressed and for wider aspects of Anna's work and, in particular, the literary aspects, see G. Buckler, Anna Comnena, A Study, Oxford 1928 (reissued 1968). One difference between the two versions needs clarification. In the Greek text Anna always describes the crusaders as ΚΕΛΤΟΙ (Keltōi) which Sewter translates as Celts, but Dawes renders Franks. In fact, H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, p.937, suggest that though the word literally means Celts, it specifically refers to Gallican Celts. Therefore Keltōi may be Anna's attempt to find a Greek word for 'Franks', the usual word used by outsiders to describe the people of western Europe. I would like to thank Miss Joan Booth of the Classics Department, University College Swansea, for her help in this matter.
2. S. pp.18-20; D. pp.2-4.
3. S. p.460; D. pp.381-382.
4. S. p.196; D. pp.150-51.
5. Buckler (p.232) does regard Anna as an eyewitness for events at Constantinople.
6. S. p.459; D. p.381.
7. On Anna's troubles with her brother and all that arose from them see B. Leib, 'Les silences d'Anne Comnène', Byzantinoslavica, 19, 1958, 1-11.
8. S. p.461; D. p.381.
9. S. p.459; D. p.381.
10. F. Chalandon, Essai sur le règne d'Alexis Comnène, Paris 1966/1971, vol. I, vii-xxi. Buckler, p.236.

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11. S. pp.313-4; D. pp.253-4.
12. S. pp.357-8; D. pp.290-91; S. p.353; D. p.287; S. pp.424-34; D. pp.342-58.
13. S. p.459; D. p.381.
14. S. p.308; D. p.248.
15. D.C. Munro, 'Did the Emperor Alexius I ask for aid at the Council of Piacenza?', American Historical Review, 27, 1922 (page nos. missing).
16. Alberti Aquensis Liber Christiane Expeditionis pro Ereptione, Emendatione et Restitutione Sanctae Hierosolymitanæ Ecclesiæ [AA ] in Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux [RHC.Oc ] vol. IV.
17. S. p.310; D. p.250.
18. S. p.315; D. p.255 and see above, n.11.
19. S. p.311; D. p.250; S. p.313; D. p.252.
20. S. p.315; D. p.254.
21. S. pp.319-20; D. p.258.
22. S. p.325; D. p.263.
23. Anonymi Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum, ed. and trans. R. Hill, London 1962, [GF ], pp.8, 9, 10-11.
24. Raimundi de Aguilers Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem [RA ] in RHC.Oc. III, 238. Translated completely by A.C. Krey, The First Crusade, Princeton 1928, reissued 1958, [Krey ].
25. S. p.326; D. p.249.
26. S. p.309; D. p.249.
27. S. pp.311-13; D. pp.250-52: compare GF pp.2-4.
28. GF. pp.7-9 and RA pp.236-8 Krey, pp.65-7.



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29. S. p.314; D. p.250; S. p.318; D. p.257: for the journey of Godfrey of Bouillon see S. Runciman, History of the Crusades, vol.1, The First Crusade, Cambridge 1962, 146-50.
30. S. p.314; D. p.253.
31. S. pp.315-19; D. pp.255-7.
32. S. pp.310-11; D. p.250 for Alexius' arrangements..
33. S. p.311 and pp.309-10; D. pp.250 and 249.
34. W. Daly, 'Christian Fraternity, the Crusades and the security of Constantinople', Medieval Studies, 22, 1960 (page nos. missing).
35. S. p.449; D. p.372.
36. S. p.315; D. p.254.
37. S. pp.318-23; D. pp.258-61.
38. Anna would have us believe that Alexius' troubles with Godfrey came to a head on Maunday Thursday, 2 April 1097: S. p.320; D. pp. 258-9, but there is good reason to think that Godfrey had settled his difficulties with Alexius by late January 1097: see H. Hagenmeyer, Chronologie de la première croisade, Paris 1902, 1097 20 Jan., 55.
39. S. p.323; D. p.261.
40. S. pp.323-4; D. pp.261-2.
41. S. pp.324-6; D. pp.262-4.
42. S. pp.326-9; D. pp.264-7.
43. GF. p.12; RA. p.238; Krey pp.97-8.
44. S. p.329; D. p.267.
45. Chalandon, p.186.
46. The anonymous author of the Gesta Francorum was a follower of Bohemond, and was generally ill-informed about the high politics of the crusading leaders. It is possible that Bohemond took this work

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- to the west in 1104 and used it to help recruit troops for his attack on Byzantium in 1107. On this see A.C. Krey, 'A neglected passage in the Gesta and its bearing on the literature of the First Crusade', The Crusades and other historical essays presented to D.C. Munro, New York 1928 (page nos. missing).
47. S. pp.329-30; D. pp.267-8.
48. GF. p.13; RA. p.238: Krey, pp.97-8: these accounts are so similar that they must be textually related. The balance of probabilities is that here, as elsewhere, Raymond of Aguilers used the GF.  
The form of Count Raymond's agreement with the Emperor was that used in peace treaties in Provence: see J.H. and L.L. Hill, 'The Convention of Alexius Comnenus and Raymond of St. Gilles', Am. H. R., 58, 1953 (page nos. missing).
49. RA. p.238.
50. J.H. and L.L. Hill, Raymond IV de St. Gilles, Comte de Toulouse 1041/2-1105, Toulouse 1959, Chap. III, 'L'Alliance Greco-Provençale', pp.35-48.
51. RA. p.267, Krey p.207: GF, p.75. However, Raymond of Aguilers alone recounts a promise of the city to Bohemond by the other leaders in February 1098, RA, p.246, Krey, p.140. This is part of a very puzzling complex of events. See my article, 'The Departure of Tatikius from the Crusader Army', Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, XLIV, 1971, 137-47.
52. S. p.352; D. p.285.
53. S. pp.333-41; D. pp.269-75.
54. S. p.335; D. pp.270-71.
55. S. p.334; D. p.270.
56. S. pp.340-41; D. pp.275-6.
57. S. pp.342-3; D. pp.277-8: Anna agrees with the Arab sources in saying that Firuz, the betrayer of Antioch, was an Armenian, but the Latin sources call him a Turk.
58. On Taticius's departure see my article cited n.51.

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59. S. p.343; D. pp.278-9.
60. GF. p.45.
61. S. pp.344-5; D. pp.279-80; S. pp.350-52; D. pp.284-5.
62. S. p.351; D. pp.284-5.
63. S. Runciman, 'The Holy Lance found at Antioch', Analecta Bollandiana, LXVIII, 1950, page nos. missing.
64. Runciman, vol. II, The Kingdom of Jerusalem, p.77.
65. S. pp.345-8; D. pp.280-82. For a discussion of this reconquest see R. Grousset, Histoire des Croisades, I, Paris 1934, 41-43.
66. S. pp.348-50; D. pp.282-4.
67. See above, p.
68. S. pp.357-8; D. pp.290-91.
69. GF. p.72.
70. The crusade nearly did break down: see my article 'From Antioch to Arqa: the Crisis of the First Crusade', Byzantion, XL, 1970, 276-308.
71. All the letters cited here are printed in H. Hagenmeyer, Kreuzzugsbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100, Innsbruck 1901, and these two translated in Krey, pp.100-101 and 107-9: 106-7 and 129.
72. Translation in Krey, pp.130-31.
73. GF. pp.11-12.
74. RA, p.255; Krey, p.178; RA. p.290; Krey, pp.246-7; GF. pp.34-35.
75. However, the Anonymous does admit that a city of Asia Minor (probably Plastencia) which the crusade captured was handed over to an imperial officer to be held: 'in fealty to God and the Holy Sepulchre, and to our leaders and the emperor ...', GF. p.26.
76. See n.46.

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77. RA. p.238, Krey pp.97-9.
78. Alexius's offer to come to the aid of the crusaders in the spring of 1099, reported by RA. p.286, Krey pp.234-5 should be seen in the context of Bohemond's seizure of Antioch. In his report of the flight of Taticius, Raymond (p.246) mentions rumour of an imperial army coming to the aid of the crusaders but the presence of the emperor is not mentioned.
79. RA. p.241, Krey p.125.
80. France, 'Departure of Tatikios', pp.138 and 144-5.
81. A letter of the crusading princes addressed to the Pope and dated 11 September 1098 makes reference to the 'unjust emperor' who had not fulfilled his obligations to the army: Krey pp.160-61 and 192-5.
82. RA. p.286, Krey p.235.
83. S. p.341; D. p.276.
84. S. p.417 and 418; D. p.343 and 344; S. p.429; D. p.344.
85. S. pp.424-34; D. pp.348-58.
86. S. p.336; D. pp.271-2.