

# **The Alexiad of Anna Comnena Study Guide**

**The Alexiad of Anna Comnena by Anna Komnene**

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# Plot Summary

The Alexiad is a history of the ruler of Byzantine Emperor Alexius I Comnena who presided over what is often referred to as the Comnenian Restoration in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. The Byzantine Empire, the descendant of the Eastern Roman Empire, was ruled by the Emperor from Constantinople. The Alexiad is written by the daughter of Alexius, Anna Comnena who writes a history of her father's deeds, stridently and frequently maintaining that she can give an impartial record despite the fact that her father is the main character.

The book is composed of a preface of fifteen minor books. There is no one plot, but many, so listing the main events in each book is appropriate. In the preface, Anna introduces herself and explains her rationale for writing the book. She defends her ability to be impartial. Book I explains how Alexius became general under the Emperor and explains the preparations for the Norman Invasion. Book II covers the revolt of Isaac and Alexius Comnena against the Emperor and Alexius's rise to power. Book III records problems with the Ducas family, Alexius's marriage to Irene, repenting for his war crimes and making preparations for war and alliances. The Normans are coming at him from the West and the Turks from the East and South.

Book IV begins the tale of the war against the Normans. It begins with Robert Guiscard of the Normans attacking Dyrachium and Alexius barely escaping with his life. Book V details Alexius's financial struggles due to the war, Bohemund's fight against Alexius, Alexius's victory and his persecution of the heretic John Italus. Book VI brings the War against Normans to an end. Alexius makes progress against the Turks, persecutes Manicheans, Robert Guiscard dies, and the Scythians prepare for war.

Book VII tells the story of the War Against Scythians and Book VIII brings it to an end. Book IX covers Alexius's skirmishes and battles with the pirate Tzachas and the Dalmatians. Book X sees the quashing of more heretics, a war against Cumans and the organization and launching of the First Crusade. Book XI tells the story of the First Crusade, including the conquest of Nicea, Antioch and Jerusalem. Bohemund makes trouble over Antioch but Alexius defeats him.

Book XII covers a series of domestic conflicts, one of which Queen Irene gets caught in. He stops Anemades's conspiracy against him and watches as the Normans prepare for their second invasion. In Book XIII, Anna explains the quashing of Aaron's conspiracy and Alexius's defense against the second Normand Invasion which ends with the Treaty of Devol, which ended the fight between Bohemund and Alexius.

Book XIV shows the rise of Turkish forces and continuing problems with the Franks. Alexius develops some health problems and uproots Manichean heretics. In Book XV, Alexius embarks on his last expeditions, crushes the Bogomil heretics and burns their leader Basil alive. He makes peace with the Turks and builds an orphanage. The book ends with Alexius's last illness and death.



# Preface and Book I

## Preface and Book I Summary and Analysis

Anna is the daughter of two royal persons, Alexius and Irene. She knows how to read and studied Greek. She studied Aristotle and Plato, and so on. The book is written to record her father's deeds which she believes shouldn't be lost, particularly his service to previous Emperors and his own time as emperor.

Alexius knew how to command and obey and Anna assures the reader that she will not distort her account in her father's favor. She decided to write the book because her husband, Caesar Nicephorus had thought it good for him to do it but he did not finish the job. Anna regrets the loss of her father; she believes that he was a great man. She notes that despite her noble birth, fortune has not been kind to her, particularly the death of her husband. Yet she is intent to write the history and will proceed to do so.

Anna's father Alexius was a service to the Roman Empire before he was emperor, particularly in his war against Ursel, a Frank by birth, who had become a tyrant and began to war against the Empire's eastern provinces. Emperor Michael made Alexius commander to fight against him, and Alexius captured him. A barbarian, Tutach, offered to aid Ursel but Ursel still lost.

Emperor Nicephorus (Botaniates) followed Michael. He sent Alexius out against Nicephorus Bryennius in the West because he had proclaimed himself Emperor of Rome. Nicephorus was brave like Alexius and so their battle was a challenging one. Alexius fought valiantly and won. He later had the help of some Turkish allies. Bryennius's plot to kill Alexius was foiled.

After Alexius won, the Emperor sent him out against Bryennius's successor, Basilacious, another man of authority and honor. The battle was difficult, but Alexius persevered. Anna notes that Rome was weak at that time, probably, in her view, due to plagues. To some extent, the Empire had brought these challenges on themselves for using foreign men to rule their provinces.

Yet fate introduced Robert the Norman to the Empire. He had a tyrannical nature and a cunning mind. He spent time in France as a robber-band leader. Through marriage and inheritance, Robert climbed the ranks of nobility. And as time progressed he amassed control over many cities in the area. Eventually Robert wanted to become emperor.

Robert also gained power because Pope Gregory VII had a dispute with King Henry IV of Germany and wanted Robert to be his ally. The Pope accused Henry of simony and Henry accused the Pope of usurpation because he assumed the Papacy without Henry's consent. The Pope had increased the tension by brutally torturing Henry's ambassadors; but Henry was despicable as well. Henry also made overtures to Robert to stop the Pope from becoming too powerful. To keep from having to fight Robert, the



Pope promised to make him a King and Robert swore to assist the Pope. Robert successfully played Henry and the Pope against one another for his advantage. During this time, Robert trained his troops and began to expand his power through conquest.

Robert's desire for the throne eventually leads him into conflict with Alexius. Robert decided to cross into Alexius's territory. Alexius needed the aid of Monomachus but did not receive it. Anna then stops the story and decides she will focus on her father's rule and explain how and why he became ruler. She will tell Robert's tale in a later book.



# Book II

## Book II Summary and Analysis

Anna must discuss lineages. Manuel was the older brother of Isaac and Alexius, the eldest of all of John Comnenus's children, Anna's paternal grandfather. John was general over all of Asia under Emperor Romanus Diogenes. Isaac was Duke of Antioch. After them, Alexius was made General-in-Chief by Emperor Michael Ducas. Later Emperor Nicephorus saw Alexius's skill in war and began to prefer him to Isaac but liked them both. Alexius was appointed General of the West.

Isaac and Alexius knew that the Queen favored them and so they suggested that the Queen adopt Alexius as a son. She obliged. The brothers had to find means of protecting themselves. At this time, the Emperor was too old for a son and thought of leaving the Empire to a man named Synadenus from the East. However, this would have been a bad idea. The adoption helped to prevent this. During the conflict over succession before the Emperor died, Alexius had a victory against the Turks. Much subterfuge is a foot between various parties afterward. Many of the relevant figures were devoted to Alexius because of his intelligence and virtue.

Isaac and Alexius's mother, Anna Dalassena, was able to marry the grandson of the Emperor to Manuel's (her eldest son) daughter. This bound their families somewhat. Eventually the goings-on of the Comneni had to be hidden from their women. Eventually, due to the conflict, the Emperor decides to pick his successor and the whole empire is excited. Most wanted Alexius to be emperor but many wanted Isaac to be emperor as well. The powerful Ducas family was Alexius's in-laws and allies at the time. Overtime, they won over Isaac's partisans. Eventually Isaac sees his support dwindle and concedes to Alexius, which Anna reminds the reader Isaac and Alexius knew was prophesied to them personally.

The weakness of the Empire during this time continued to invite attacks. A man named Melissenus had amassed an army in order to assume the emperor's throne. When he sees the strength of the Comnenus family, he offers his hand in alliance but wants to rule Asia, but the brothers declined but they did make him a smaller offer. Another man, Botaniates, also wanted the throne but saw the Comneni's power and Melissenus's army. He also wanted to rule but could not see how to bring this about. Negotiations, alliances and diplomatic tussles begin. Botaniates sees that his position is hopeless and wishes to concede to Melissenus. But this did not make much difference, given the position of Isaac and Alexius.

When the Comneni's come to Constantinople, the Patriarch, who had the gift of prophecy, advised the aging emperor to abdicate to Alexius in order to stem a civil war. He encourages the emperor to concede to God's will and the Emperor agrees.



# Book III

## Book III Summary and Analysis

As Alexius ascends to the throne, problems begin to arise with the Ducas family. Queen Maria Ducas and her son Constantine continue to live in the imperial palace. Many were suspicious of Maria staying in the palace and some said that Alexius would make her his wife. John Ducas wanted to drive Maria out of the palace to remove suspicion. It was not clear who the Empress would be as Alexius was crowned Emperor without an Empress by Patriarch Cosmas. Alexius eventually decides to make his wife Irene Empress.

Alexius and Irene were a beautiful couple but Irene was only a girl, not yet sixteen. She was the daughter of Andronicus, Caesar's eldest son. Anna goes on to praise her mother. Nicephorus is next made Caesar according to their agreement, but Isaac should get a higher office. Since there was no higher office, Alexius invented one - the title 'Sebastocrator' - or second emperor. He invented other titles as well. Eustratius Garidas next becomes Patriarch, following Cosmas. Alexius also felt compelled to grant special privileges to Queen Maria and her son Constantine.

After the titles are taken care of, Alexius begins to feel guilty for his soldiers plundering of the city. God gave him this grief and confessed it. Before Cosmas stepped down, he held a private synod to absolve Alexius after Alexius confessed to the assembly of priests. Alexius also desired that his mother, Anna Dalassena, have more power, although she did not want any. He practically forced her to receive increased authority and they more or less ruled together, despite her desire to focus only on God.

Robert begins to make new trouble and so Alexius must prepare the military, leaving his mother in charge, who Anna insists was trustworthy. Thus, it is not quite proper to call Alexius Emperor at this time. Instead, he is focused on protecting the Empire against assaults. Anna the Elder, however, restored morals to the empire and ruled well. Yet at this same time, the Turks begin to spread into Asia Minor, looking to challenge the new emperor. Robert was pushing for Michael to be Emperor and prepared his armies further. Alexius was intent to restore the Empire's power against the Turks and Robert. He sent word to local governors to prepare. He also attempts to prevent Monomachus from allying with Robert. Alexius was able to secure against the Turks in the East, and the Normans and Robert, when crossing the Adriatic, are weakened by weather.

# Book IV

## Book IV Summary and Analysis

This book begins the war with the Normans in 1081 and 1082. Robert is occupying the continent and is about to conquer Dyrrachium. His troops were vast, but the ruler of the city, George Palaeologus, built bulwarks against him. Yet Robert had siege-engines. It became clear that Robert was aiming to rule the entire Roman Empire and wanted to take Dyrrachium to begin. Palaeologus keeps Alexius informed. Robert took Valona and Alexius was afraid because he had only a fraction of Robert's troops. He needed the Turkish Sultan's aid and the help of his Venetian allies. The Venetians promised to protect Dyrrachium and sent ships. Battle begins and the Venetians and Palaeologus fight together against Robert's men. They won and Robert withdrew.

Robert was not about to give up, however. He could not launch ships during the winter so he bides his time until the spring. The Venetians then win a sea battle against Robert and Robert's men suffer from diseases. Robert presses on and his disregard for his troubles frightens Alexius. Alexius asks for Pacurianus's help and he himself leaves Constantinople in August. During another battle with Robert, Palaeologus had been seriously wounded and yet he went back into battle. Robert continued to fight.

Robert maintains to his men his desire to establish Michael on the throne and he promises his men and their leaders that they can pillage for money if and when God gives them victory. Anna maintains that Alexius had smarter and nobler goals. Alexius planned a night ambush but had to change plans. He did so ably. In the morning, Alexius and Robert begin to engage in battle, lightly at first. Robert is able to outmaneuver Alexius in some respects, splitting up the Roman phalanx. He was able to capture the area containing the Imperial Tent and the equipment of the Roman Army. Alexius is only barely able to escape, but does so heroically. Robert's Frankish troops nearly had the chance to kill Alexius.



# Book V

## Book V Summary and Analysis

Robert's fears are allayed and he plunders the Imperial Tent entirely. His troops rejoice. Amalfi gives itself over to Robert freely. Alexius looked weak. But Alexius was only resting in Achrída and then Diabolis. He sought to reenergize his troops and supporters. Alexius knew Robert's strength now and condemned his leaders for not properly resisting them. He needed allies but had no money to get them.

The Comnenis pool their riches to procure the necessary funds and took from families who were positive disposed towards them, but this money was not enough. Robert prepared for her and so Alexius examined ancient law about selling Church property. They decided it was lawful to sell property when ransoming prisoners of war. So they sold to those areas where Christians were not in the majority. The Patriarch Metaxas opposed the sale of Church property and valuables. The head of the Chalcedonian church, Leo, opposed them as well. But Isaac continued to college money.

When the people heard that Alexius had survive, he found many new recruits who happened to be well-trained. Robert could now be resisted and Alexius returned to the capital to college his troops. The King of Alamania allied with Alexius and travelled with troops to Lombardy to put pressure on Robert. Robert gave troops over to his son, Bohemund and took his own troops to fight the Alamanian king. Robert sent some of his troops to pursue the King and took the rest and went to see the Pope. Bohemund's troops were defeated. The Emperor's troops had defeated him. Initially the battle looked bad for Alexius but his cunning and faith got him through. He had been strengthened by a prophecy from Protomartyr Demetrius.

The actual battle between Alexius and Bohemund was complex. Alexius was able to draw Bohemund's troops away from his encampment and then lay siege to it while it was undefended. Alexius slew Bohemund's troops there. The next day, Bohemund and his troops were engaged by Michael Ducas's troops, but they fared poorly against Bohemund and his troops had to retreat. Alexius's troops were, however, able to catch up with Bohemund and fight back. Alexius eventually won and Bohemund retreated.

When Alexius returned home he found that a heretic, John Italus, was spreading false doctrine. Italus was from Italy and lived in Sicily. The Sicilians were prepared for war against Rome. Italus gained an education but used it for sophistical purposes. He is eventually implicated in a treacherous plot but he is able to escape to Byzantium and teach philosopher. He lectured on Aristotle and Plato. He was a smart man and wrote in a dense, and complex way. His dialectical skill allowed him to overwhelm his opponents. The youth flocked to him as a result. When Alexius became emperor, he knew of Italus and sent the learned Isaac to question him. When questioned, Italus answered with heretical doctrines. His bad and heretical behavior turned the whole of Constantinople against him. He ran and hid but his doctrines continued and had to be refuted. Italus

was caught and refused to recant. He was then excommunicated but he later repented and his sentence was lightened.



# Book VI

## Book VI Summary and Analysis

Book six explains the end of the war against the Normans in 1085 and the transition to a new series of events during the rule of Emperor Alexius. Bryennius, Robert's ally, was holding Castoria and Alexius wanted to drive him out. Through a clever plan of assaulting the city from two sides, Alexius takes the city. Bryennius swears an oath to never raise arms against Alexius for the rest of his days.

Anna takes a brief detour to discuss the suppression of the Paulicians, a group of heretical quasi-Manicheans. Alexius saw them as a blemish on his conquered lands. Alexius lured them, group by group, to be examined by his men, and then they were captured, and their property confiscated. Some repented and were allowed a Christian baptism. Eventually he released many of them.

Afterwards, Alexius returned to Constantinople. On his way back, he heard that many spoke ill of his methods of financing war. So he goes before a Church Court and is examined by Christian priests. He defends himself on the grounds that he did what was necessary. During his time in Constantinople, it became clear that a conspiracy was planned against him and was organized by senate leaders and chief officers in the army. In response, Alexius imposed a light penalty on them - confiscation of their goods and exile of the ringleaders. Alexius is also able to gain the alliance of a large group of Manicheans (not the Paulicians).

Bohemund is still in Valone and hears about Bryennius and that many former allies want to ally with the Emperor. When he reported this to Robert, Robert was stunned. He could not understand how he could not be successful and hatched a new plot against Alexius, summoning his allies. Robert sent his other two sons, Roger and Gidus, to avenge Bohemund's loss. Robert led a separate force which eventually united with the other forces, but before Robert could attack, his city Corfu, revolted, so Robert had to leave to suppress the revolt. On his way, he took a fleet of ships home but the Venetians intercepted him. They were victorious in their attacks. Robert counterattacked unexpectedly, which surprised the Venetians. The battle was terrible and the Venetians refused to buckle, retaining their alliance with Alexius. When the Venetians had their ships in order, they counterattacked, nearly capturing Gidus and his wife. They were victorious and sent word to Alexius, who honored them with gifts, titles and exemption from Roman authority.

Robert did not rest after defeat, but he came down with a fever. Eventually Robert died, probably from the fever. One of his sons took over. Alexius was relieved when he heard. Bryennius's army deserted to him and his wife gave birth to Anna. Anna's birth was greeted with great joy. Anna then discusses Alexius's truce with the Turks and their leader, Soliman, but Soliman committed suicide. His successor, Apelchasesem, was not bound by the truce and began to war against Alexius. However, when Apelchasesem was



defeated in battle and heard that an enemy, Prosuch, was giving him trouble, he sought peace with Alexius, which he accepted; he also gave tribute. Prosuch had a large army, attacking Nicea. The people and Apelchasesem asked for Alexius's help, which he gave to strengthen his weaker enemy. He used this opportunity to enlarge the boundaries of the Empire and scared off some of Prosuch's men. A conflict with the Sultan ensues as well. Anna ends the book by discussing the threat from the Scythians.



# Book VII

## Book VII Summary and Analysis

Tzelgu, the commander of the Scythian army, decided to make war on Alexius. During another battle, however, Tzelgu received a mortal wound and died. Alexius was victorious barely having to lift a finger. He made his brother Adrian ruler of the area and drove Scythians out of many districts. After some successes, Alexius considered assaulting the Scythians directly. Some try to dissuade him but fail. The Scythians try to make peace, but Alexius did not believe them. This led to some uneasiness and self-doubt on Alexius's behalf. When he takes his troops to a Scythian city, the Scythians amass many men and attacked the Imperial tent. Alexius drove them off, then fortifying some of the border cities. The Scythians then attacked Pristhlava and surprised Alexius. The deaths on both sides were great. Scythian reinforcements came towards the end of the battle. Alexius was forced to retreat.

Tatus, an ally of Alexius, had won over the Comans to fight against the Scythians and the Comans began to fight the Scythians directly. The Comans won a decisive victory. The war between Alexius and the Scythians was not yet over because while the Comans and the Scythians struck a truce, the Scythians violated it. For a while the Scythian war goes on hold, however.

Alexius must now deal with a Turkish pirate, Tzachus, from western Anatolia. When Alexius sent ships to apprehend Tzachus, he lost the sea battle. Tzachus prepared a fleet with many Turks and went to fight against the Imperial soldiers who were lead by General Opus. The Scythians also make overtures to Tzachus against Alexius. Tzachus tells Alexius that for peace he must have his titles restored, that were lost when Alexius became Emperor. Without agreeing, Alexius secures victory against Tzachus through an attack on Tzachus launched by Dalassenus. After this conflict, Alexius hear that the Scythians are plotting against him again and a deserter named Neantztes was conspiring to kill him. Alexius goes out to meet the Scythians and Neantztes comes under suspicion. A terrible battle with the Scythians takes place and then matters come to a standstill. Then the battle resumes and the Scythians are defeated. Alexius embarks on an expedition against the Scythians and won several victories against them.



# Book VIII

## Book VIII Summary and Analysis

Book VIII brings an end to the Scythian war in 1091. Alexius reveals his expedition against the Scythians and plans to make an attack on them. Anna then describes a battle that Alexius won against the Scythians. The next day another battle occurs, and Alexius wins it as well, capturing a conquered Byzantine city. Alexius had won an 'astounding' victory. The people rejoiced when Alexius entered the city. And Alexius then hears word that Tzahcas is collecting a fleet again. He tries to raise a mercenary army from afar in order to defend against him.

The Scythians send large armies to counterattack at Choereni. Alexius's forces were much stronger. The Comans sent troops but Alexius feared they would turn on him. Alexius invites the Coman leaders to speak with him and he gives them permission to pursue the Scythians. The Comans and Alexius together gradually take Scythian land. Alexius finds Neantzes, the traitor and imprisons him. The Scythians want piece and try to reach out to the Comans and the Emperor secretly, but they did not trust these overtures. The Comans and Alexius decide to embark on a battle that would prove pivotal to the war. Some troops deserted to Alexius as well. Despite the Scythians's large army, Alexius and the Comans massacre them at Levunium. That day the Scythians, not only their soldiers but men, wives and children, were wiped out. Nearly all Scythians were killed or captured. Anna sees it as something like a miracle. The Comans become suspicious that Alexius will come after them next and decide to flee, leaving some of their booty behind. Anna then concludes the narrative of the Scythians wars.

A few days after the victory against the Scythians, Alexius learns of a plot against him. It was thwarted. He heard of a rumor about a Coman invasion and he worried about the possibility of revolt. The weeks and months following the victory against the Scythians were plagued with internal dissension and skirmishes. The throne was not safe. Anna details some of them, noting that Alexius was not harmed and triumphed against all the plots against him.

# Book IX

## Book IX Summary and Analysis

Book IX opens with Alexius's operations against Tzachas and the Dalmatians. Alexius receives reliable information on Tzachas's movements. He saw himself as having Imperial authority and was amassing an appropriately sized office. John Ducas engages Tzachas on the land when he could but achieved little, which frustrated Alexius. Ducas doubled down and continues to battle Tzachas and Tzachas eventually backed down. Ducas is able to capture many of Tzachas's vessels but not before Tzachas could bring in some Turks on his side. However, with help, Ducas is eventually victorious.

Alexius hears that there has been a rebellion in Crete and sent Ducas to quell it; the people murdered the rebels and submitted to Ducas. Similar trouble arose on Cyprus and then Tzachas got involved and attacked and conquered Smyrna. Alexius selected the Thalassocrator to fight Tzachas. Alexius tells the Sultan about Tzachas's forces and the Sultan, Clitziasthan, took his army to Tzachas. Tzachas was helpless and submitted to the Sultan's request to have dinner. When Tzachas was drunk with win, the Sultan murdered him. Peace was restored.

Yet Alexius was caught up in another war. Bolcanus of the Dalmatians began to conquer and sucked Alexius into combat, laying siege to numerous cities. Alexius was upset and armed himself, taking his troops towards Dalmatia. He also must confront a plot by Diogenes Nicephorus. Anna is jumping around a bit and so stops to explain Diogenes's conspiracy from the beginning. After she tells the story, she reports that when Alexius discovered the conspiracy he wondered how it could have happened because he had affection for Diogenes. The conspiracy, of course, was thwarted; he was banished and imprisoned. Alexius then had a royal meeting to pardon various criminals and finds that Diogenes had been blinded. All the while, Alexius never stopped caring for Diogenes and when Diogenes confesses, Alexius pardons him.

# Book X

## Book X Summary and Analysis

A new heretic, Nilus, followed Italus and sucked many into his heterodoxy. He was very ignorant of church tradition. Nilus was quickly anathematized. Alexius was able to bring his authority to bear on crushing the heresy. He was imprisoned and secretary cavorted with the Comans. They stole him away to their own country. The details of the escape are explained. Conflict with the Comans arises as a result and war comes. Skirmishes develop and the Comans persist to such a degree that Alexius believes he must personally lead troops against them. Anna tracks her father's movements.

At this time, the Turks start to attack Bithynia and plundered the countryside. Alexius hatched a plot against the Turkish incursions, however. It involved digging a canal. Anna explains the details. The canal was successful in blocking the incursions but before Alexius could relax Frankish armies amass. He was fearful because he knew that the Franks were irresistible and committed. Alexius prepared himself, and they were led by Peter, the Cucupeter. Oddly, the barbarian forces assembled in a decentralized fashion.

Alexius knew that Peter had suffered before the Turks. The Normans followed the Franks in approaching in mass numbers. They devastated the area around Nicea. The brother of the King of France, Ubus, sent Alexius an odd message. And the meeting was peculiar. Various other events occur where forces are amassed. It is not entirely clear what is going on. They were all coming together to worship at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

Many of the men arrived in order to embark on the First Crusade. There are conflicts with Romans, who are patrolling the seas. There was dissension against Alexius from Godfrey of Bouillon, as there was from Count Raoul. From these groups various Crusaders were selected in Constantinople. The group was very heterogeneous. Alexius wanted them all to swear an oath of loyalty to him. Most leaders make homage to him. Even Bohemund was eager to win Alexius's goodwill; but Alexius feared Bohemund's power.





# Book XI

## Book XI Summary and Analysis

Bohemund, the Counts, Godfrey combined forces with Isangeles. Together they are to conquer Nicea. The 'barbarians' there asked for the Sultan's aid but he delayed. The people of Nicea decided to surrender but changed their minds when they heard the Sultan's troops were on the way. When the Sultan's army engaged, a terrible battle began, but the Turks eventually lost. The Sultan now knows the extent of the troops. The siege of Nicea continues. Eventually Nicea is captured and Butumites is made Duke of Nicea by Alexius.

Alexius continued to press for all the counts to swear their loyalty to him but some resisted. Tacitus and the Frankish troops continue to move forward, conquering more land. The next major city to be besieged is Antioch. There is an attempt to convince Bohemund that Alexius is after his life but Antioch is conquered nonetheless. They then build a wall to defend it against future assaults.

Alexius wanted to join the Franks in battle but Tzachas made trouble for him in Smyrna and an ally held Ephesus. Christians were treated like slaves there. Alexius sends John Ducas to fight for him. Ducas wins many victories against Tzachas and drives him out of Smyrna. When Alexius received news of victory, he left to aid the Franks in Antioch. The Franks had faced a dramatic defeat. Sultan of Choroson heard that Alexius was on his way and had amassed troops to engage Alexius. The Franks would not be able to hold a city they just captured. Alexius couldn't defend Antioch and Constantinople at once, so he ordered the Franks to leave, taking whatever booty they could carry.

Next the Latins attempt to capture Jerusalem. When they are inspired by a divine sign, they rush straight into fighting the Turks, who were terrified that God was with the Christians. The Turks fled before Antioch and the Imperial troops captured various bases on the way to Jerusalem. They prepared for a long siege and eventually took Jerusalem.

However, the Prince of Babylon, Amerimnes, decided to engage the Crusaders and then beat the Latins, driving them back to Ramel and then conquering it. And at this point, the Crusaders are put on the defense not only there but against Cyprus as well. Godfrey dies and the Latins seek a new king for Jerusalem.

A Norman army led by the Flanders brothers joins the Crusader forces and departs for Jerusalem. Yet they wanted to avoid fighting with the Franks. They took an alternative route to Choroson. When they captured a town, they slaughtered priests and Christians. The Turks beat the Normans in battle and completely routed them. Isangeles died from a disease during this time.



Alexius presses Bohemund to swear his oath to the Empire and asks Bohemund to withdraw from Antioch until he does. Bohemund accuses Alexius of not aiding him according to their agreement. Bohemund, apparently, had not changed. He refused to yield. Next the Franks get the Pisans to amass a fleet to invade various islands and left for Rhodes. A naval war with the Genoans ensues and Alexius plans to war against Bohemund. Bohemund knew he could not withstand Alexius must longer, so he faked his own death and had his nephew fake the news. Bohemund leaves his nephew Tancred in charge of Jerusalem and returns to Lomardy to rule.

# Book XII

## Book XII Summary and Analysis

When Bohemund reached Lomardy, he did not waste time amassing forces to occupy Illyria. He sought a matrimonial alliance with the King of France and had another of his daughters marry Tancred. Then he collated troops. Alexius received notice but at this time the Sultan of Cairo, the Babylonian, was crushing imperial troops. Alexius is pulled at both ends, but many Counts fought against Bohemund's attempt to turn his people against the Emperor. Yet Alexius still needed troops to defend against the Franks.

Tancred then proceeds against the Empire in Sicilia and Alexius sent troops to repel him. Alexius wanted to travel the western countries and compelled Empress Irene to accompany him. Anna then proceeds to laud the glories of her mother and father together. Alexius must now organize his defenses against the Franks in the West. At this time a great comet hung in the sky for forty days. He decided to fight against Bohemund in Thessalonica. While doing so, however, Alexius must repel a plot against him from the Anemades and the citizens of Antioch. They intended to murder Alexius but Providence prevented them. Gregory Taronites revolted against Alexius in Trapezus; Alexius sent troops against him and overtook him, capturing him.

Alexius makes Isaac Contostephanus the Duke of the fleet and sends him to Dyrrachium in Illyria to meet Bohemund. Contostephanus is to watch the straits for Bohemund's crossing. Bohemund meets with the Pope to excite his and the Italians's rage against Alexius. The Pope then allowed Bohemund to cross into Illyria. The Franks looked as if they would be victorious over Contostephanus but he was able to repel them. Yet he left another area unguarded and Bohemund was able to cross through Valona. He had a large army of Franks and Gauls, Germans and Celtiberians. He then sieged Dyrrachium and took it. This begins the Norman Invasion of the Empire.

# Book XIII

## Book XIII Summary and Analysis

The first part of Book XIII covers Aaron's conspiracy against Alexius. Through a complex series of event, Alexius captures Aaron's servant Strategius who admits to Alexius when pressed that Aaron sent him to kill Strategus. The conspiracy was quashed, delaying Alexius only five days. Alexius then makes for Thessalonic and made plans to siege Dyrrachium. The siege took some time but Alexius blockaded Dyrrachium's food supplies and the barbarian army suffered disease and famine. Anna reports the details of the Siege and Alexius's use of a battering ram and fire.

With Dyrrachium repossessed, Alexius moves towards Diabolis to engage in various activities in the mainland. He is after Bohemund but wanted to defeat him without engaging in direct battle. He tries to woo Bohemund's friends, allies and servants, hoping to woo them and incur Bohemund's anger against them, forcing them to oppose him openly. Anna then covers Alexius's various operations in the mainland and the details of how his governors fared against various assaults. He encounters Bohemund and the Franks along the way. Alexius wins and sets fire to Bohemund's ships. The Bohemund conflict continues to escape but Alexius's general pressed him back. Eventually, Bohemund sends men on a peace mission. Alexius accepted his offer.

Bohemund offers to go visit the Emperor on the condition that his men held hostage were released. Alexius obliged. Bohemund then travels to see Alexius and they negotiate a settlement. The negotiations with Bohemund become tedious, however and last for some time. Anna covers the negotiations in detail and describes Bohemund's appearance; she also reproduces many records of the negotiation. Both men swear for peace, split various territories, negotiated tribute, hostage releases and so on. The Treaty of Devol is signed in September 1109. Various witnesses presided and signed the treaty.

# Book XIV

## Book XIV Summary and Analysis

Book XIV covers various problems with the Turks, Franks, Comans and Manicheans. The peace with Bohemund was a success but Alexius had to focus on the Franks for some time before he went home. There are some skirmishes with the Turks and Bohemund dies. His nephew Tancred keeps a hold of Antioch afterward. Alexius felt that the Franks had broken their oath. At the same time, Alexius sent Roman armies to fight the Turks. Tancred proved difficult to handle. Alexius was furious and wanted to march against Tancred but his advisers dissuaded him. Alexius then tried other tactics to regain control over Antioch and engaged in battles with Baldunius and the Butumites.

Things get difficult for Alexius. He finds out that the Pisans, Genoans and Lombards are going to use their ships to lay waste to the sea-board. Alexius leaves to a base to plan his defense against them. The Sultan Saisan begins to send troops from Chorosan to march against Asian territories Alexius ruled. The governor of Philadelphia intercepted them, however. They wanted to negotiate with Alexius and both sides came to an agreement. When the Franks learn of the size of Alexius's fleet they decide not to attack; but Chorosan did not rest, sending fifty thousand men against Alexius. Alexius also became ill at this time with several foot pains, which was not due to heredity. Apparently it was due to an old war wound. His worries about the empire compounded his pain.

Anna resumes her story about the various threats Alexius faced, particularly from the Turks who were breathing down his neck. Anna describes the details. Alexius eventually defeats Corosan's troops and other Turkish forces. Constantinople rejoices in Alexius's victories. Anna then transitions into an extended defense of her impartiality, maintaining that she would criticize her father wherever he erred. She also claims that her records are accurate because she was alive when the events in the records occurred. She details that her memory and testimony make up much of the details.

After peace with the Turks was achieved, Alexius had only a year's rest before he heard that the Comans had crossed the Ister and had entered his territory. Alexius quickly took his troops to confront them. Anna notes that the quasi-Manichean heretics, the Paulicians, had power in the Coman nation. Alexius was able to subdue many of them and argued against them, holding that he held a line directly from the apostles and they did not. Anna suggests that her father is the thirteenth apostle and is equal in stature to Constantine the Great. Many of the Manicheans converted due to Alexius's arguments. He had some of his men prepare a lengthy disputation against the Manicheans. He continues to convert them as well, arguing with them in a war of words. After trying to convert the leaders of the Manicheans, Alexius imprisoned them. He supplied them with all they need to live but left them to 'die in company with their sins alone.'



# Book XV

## Book XV Summary and Analysis

Book XV covers Alexius's last expeditions, the Bogomils and Alexius's death which all occur between 1116 and 1118. The book opens with new threats from the Turks, particularly from Sultan Soliman who wanted to take land in Asia. Alexius knew his plan and built up his forces. The sorts of preparations and wrangling that are characteristic of the other battles in the entire book are reported here. Eventually the Turks come upon Alexius's troops directly while the Empress is with him, but she weathers her fear with grace. Alexius and his men rush into battle preparations and posted guards; he also consoled the Empress.

Eventually battle comes and Alexius sends forth his troops to attack and achieved several victories. Alexius invented some new battle tactics using phalanxes that greatly impressed Anna. In one of the battles, Anna's brother Andronicus Porphyrogenitus was killed. Anna eulogizes him. Nicephorus leads the other group of troops and forces the Sultan to retreat. Alexius was happy with the victory he achieved. But the Sultan regrouped and attacked again. Alexius continues to use his very unusual battle-formation which is hard for Anna to describe. It is not a typical phalanx formation. The Turks continue to fight but the Sultan is murdered by his evil bastard brother, Masut.

After the battle, Alexius saw that many women had died and their children were left alone, so Alexius builds an orphanage. He also established various facilities to care for the sick and elderly. Many of the orphaned children were sent to monasteries, not as slaves but as free children and were educated. Some resisted these deeds and Anna condemns them. She then describes some of the curriculum Alexius preferred.

In the next few years, a large number of heretics arose with strange doctrines. They were known as the Bogomils, who were a mixture of Massalians and Manicheans. The Bogomils had been around for some time, perhaps before Alexius was born. Alexius begins to inquire into the heresy. They said that a man named Basil was their leaders. Alexius sent men to find him, which they do. Alexius confronts Basil directly. Basil spoke well but was actually evil, according to Anna. Heresies were read out but Basil did not recant. Basil's heresy is too evil to repeat openly but Alexius's order wrote a disputation against is called the Dogmatic Panoply. Alexius also had leaders of the Bogomils discovered, captured and burned alive to protect true Christians against their heresies. The Patriarch, Nicholas, and members of the holy Synod found Basil unrepentant and recommended that he be burned. Alexius obliged; the details of the burning are rather gruesome and are recorded.

A year and a half after the Bogomil incident, Alexius fell ill. He was full of rheumatic pain throughout his extremities. His physicians underestimated his danger. Alexius drank various medicines and the pain subsided. But six months later it returned, depressing him. His breathe is shortened. The disease was terrible often closing off Alexius's ability



to breathe, although pepper eased his suffering. His days were full of suffering. And the doctors' treatments did not work. Alexius's gums became inflamed and his tongue swollen. He could barely eat and he started to have diarrhea. The Empress was distraught. Alexius was pulled into a final fit and died. Anna's grief was so terrible she still wonders if she did not die of it. She wonders why such a great man died and she was left alive. She then eulogizes him in detail.



# Characters

## Emperor Alexius Comnena

Alexius I Comnena (sometimes written as Alexios I Komnenos) was the Emperor of the Byzantine Empire from 1081 to 1118 and lived from 1048 to 1118. He created the Comnenian Dynasty and restored much of the Byzantine Empire's lost glory since the time of Constantine the Great.

The story is about Alexius's rule. It covers his family's revolt against the previous emperor and Alexius's coming to power. Once in power he faced innumerable threats, particularly from the Normans, lead by Robert Guiscard, and the Seljuk Turks led by many leaders, including Sultan Corosan. Alexius discovered many plots against him and quashed conspiracies every few books, some of which were led against him by his friends. He survived them all. He also had to fight against heretics and he was merciless in his treatment of them. He crushed the Paulicians, Manicheans and the Bogomils during his lifetime. He burned Basil, the leader of the Bogomils, alive. Alexius also initiated, organized and led the First Crusade, which led to the capture of Nicea, Antioch and Jerusalem from Muslim rulers.

Anna paints a very positive picture of her father, often excusing his actions and when she admits he acted poorly she goes out of her way to explain that he repented or that he had a good heart. Alexius's general impact on the fortunes of the Byzantine Empire was positive and after his death, he stood as one of the great figures in the history of the Eastern Roman Empire.

## Anna Comnena

Anna Comnena (also known as Anna Komnene) is the author of the book and the daughter of Emperor Alexius and Empress Irene Doukaina. She lived from 1083 to 1153 A.D. She was not only a princess but a scholar. She was born in the palace in Constantinople and was Alexius's oldest child. She studied Greek philosophy, history, math, science and so on. She was perhaps the most educated female in the world.

Anna was initially supposed to marry Constantine Ducas, the son of the previous Emperor, Michael VII and his wife Maria. When Constantine died, however, she was married to a young nobleman named Caesar Nikephoros Bryennios at age fourteen. He was a well-respect general and historian. They were married for forty years. Caesar embarked on the writing of a history of Alexius's life and deeds, but when he died, Anna picked up where he let off. She was 55 at the time and wrote the Alexiad which became the major historical source for knowledge about Byzantine history between the 11th and 12th centuries.

Throughout the book, Anna plays a minor role but she remembered everything she heard and saw. She maintains over and over again that she is impartial despite the fact





that the subject of her work is her father. It is transparently clear that she is not. Nonetheless, Anna Comnena's history is one of the most important historical works from the Hellenic period.

## **Robert Guiscard**

Robert Guiscard was a Norman robber who became the leader of the Normans unusually fast. He led numerous troops against Alexius, challenging him and nearly killing him on one occasion. He is perhaps the major villain of the book.

## **Bohemund of Antioch**

Bohemund is the son of Robert Guiscard and takes over Robert's forces when Robert dies. He leads the second Norman invasion against Alexius and the Byzantines but fails. When he and Alexius make peace, Bohemund joins him in the First Crusade. When he takes Antioch, he refuses to yield to Alexius.

## **Empress Irene Comnena**

The wife of Alexius and the mother of Anna.

## **Anna Dalassena Comnena**

Anna Comnena the Elder was Anna's grandmother and Alexius's father.

## **Issac Comnena**

Alexius's older brother an ally in the revolt that brought Alexius to power.

## **The Ducas Family**

A famous noble family in the Byzantine Empire, directly descended (allegedly) from Constantine the Great. They struggled against the Comnena's for power but once Alexius had solidified his rule, they were great allies.

## **Tancred**

Bohemund's nephew who helped him to rule conquered provinces.



## **Tzachas**

Also known as Chaka of Smyrna, Tzachas was a Turkish emir (described as a 'pirate' by Anna) who tussled with Alexius.

## **Nicephorus Bryennius**

One of the great Byzantine generals under Alexius and eventual husband of Anna.

## **Heretics**

Alexius crushed various heretical sects of Christianity as Emperor.

## **Conspirators**

Various conspirators made attempts on Alexius's life throughout his rule.

## **Turks and Sultans**

The Turks and the Sultans who led them were a constant threat to Alexius.



## Objects/Places

### The Imperial Throne

The Imperial Throne of the Byzantine Empire is the office of Emperor that Alexius held.

### The Byzantine Empire

The descendant of the Eastern Roman Empire which descended directly from the Roman Empire. Alexius was the Emperor of the Byzantines in the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries.

### Constantinople, the Queen of Cities

The capital city of the Byzantine Empire and the home of the Comnenas.

### Jerusalem

The famed holy city that Alexius conquered during the First Crusade.

### Antioch

An ancient Greek city in modern day Turkey, Antioch was an important connecting city between Constantinople and Jerusalem. Bohemund conquered it during the First Crusade and refused to hand it over to Alexius.

### Nicea

Sometimes spelled as Nicaea or Iznik, Nicea lies between Constantinople and Antioch, and was ruled by the Seljuk Turks during Alexius's rule. During the First Crusade, however, he conquered it.

### Dyrrachium

A city on the coast of modern day Albania, it was a crucial battleground between Robert Guiscard and other Norman forces and Alexius.



## **The Frankish Kingdom**

The Frankish Empire was a major threat to Alexius throughout his rule. The Franks were legendary warriors and often frightened Alexius with their ferocity. Robert Guiscard and Bohemund both led the Franks, although the Empire had become divided in their time.

## **The Seljuk Sultanate**

Seljuk Sultanate is the office of Sultan within the Seljuk dynasty which was a major threat to Alexius throughout his rule.

## **The Patriarchate and Synods**

The Orthodox Christian Church was the church of the Byzantine Empire. It plays a minor role in the book, as Alexius is more or less its leader, despite the fact that its affairs are run by a head Patriarch and priestly Synods.

## **Siege Weapons**

Weapons used to lay siege to cities; they were particularly adept at breaking down or overcoming barriers.

## **Miracles**

Alexius often looked to miracles for guidance in his battle campaigns.

## **Prophecy**

From time to time, alleged prophecies play an important role in the book.

## **Battles**

The Alexiad is chock full of battles of various kinds.

## **Hostages**

Battles usually ended with numerous hostages; sometimes they were treated extremely badly.



## The Church of the Holy Sepulchre

The Church that lies on the ground where Jesus is said to have been crucified; it was a valued possession in the First Crusade.



# Themes

## Religious Conflict

Religious conflict is a key theme in the Alexiad partly because Alexius is the leader of the Orthodox Church in the Byzantine Empire. The Orthodox Christian Church has a long history of Caesaro-Papism, which makes regional secular rulers the head of the Church. The Orthodox Church is technically managed by the Patriarch, but the Emperor has official religious duties. This was true in the Eastern Roman Empire from the days of Constantine the Great in the 4th century. For this reason, Alexius is responsible for the defense of Christianity as he understands it. This manifests itself in the book in four ways.

First, Alexius is required to abide by Christian principles. So at times he will call priests and confess his war crimes to them, or he and his family will look for a sign for God about some issue or other. Further, he pays respects to the Patriarch and helps to make doctrinal decisions within the Church. Second, Alexius is responsible for the suppression of heretics and Alexius fulfills this role with great zeal and ferocity, viciously crushing the Paulicians, Manicheans and Bogomils, burning Basil, the leader of the Bogomils, alive.

Third, Alexius is the de facto defeater of the entirety of Europe against the encroachments of the Muslims. The Western Roman Empire (which has decayed by this time) is protected from the East by the Byzantine Empire and so the Byzantines must deal with Muslims directly. Alexius must fight the Seljuk Turks time and time again. Finally, Alexius initiates and leads the First Crusade which is meant to recapture the Holy Land from the Muslims.

## External Political Conflict

The Alexiad is primarily a story of political conflict, and so it is no surprise that political conflict is the major theme of the book. Every single book contains at least two political conflicts and sometimes more. They are too numerous to count. For the sake of brevity, let us confine our focus to political clashes with extra-Byzantine forces.

Alexius inherits a crumbling Byzantine Empire which is only a shadow of its former glory under Constantine the Great and afterward. The spread of Islam and the collapse of the Western Roman Empire have hemmed the Byzantine Empire in between various tribal and barbarian kingdoms to its west and a few, powerful and prosperous Muslim Sultinates to the east and South. Thus, the primary political conflicts are on the Byzantine Empire's Western edge and its Eastern and Southern Edge.

The primary conflict to the west comes from the Normans, formerly of the Frankish Empire. The Normans come to be led by Robert Guiscard a robber who gained political power and quickly rose to lead a massive force that assaulted the Byzantine Empire



and nearly killed Alexius. Robert plays a primary role in the book as a villain. His son, Bohemund, is also important. He leads the second Norman Invasion and while Alexius eventually repels the attack, he does so at cost. Eventually Bohemund aids Alexius in the First Crusade but makes trouble afterward.

The latter half of the book contains conflicts with numerous Turkish groups but primarily the Seljuk Turks, whose empire directly borders the Byzantine Empire. There are no huge names here besides Tzachas but they are perhaps an even greater threat to Alexius than the Normans.

## Internal Political Conflict

Political conflict is the primary theme of *The Alexiad* and while many of those conflicts are external, quite a few are internal. Being the ruler of an Empire is not easy. Many are envious of your position and a few are in a position to attain it if the Emperor is not careful. Alexius and his brother Isaac led his family to take the throne from the previous emperor, so they came to power through dissension and revolt. The Ducas family nearly did the same and proved a threat to Alexius for a time until he gave them a share in power.

Alexius uncovers and quashes numerous conspiracies against him. Most are assassination plots, some led by his supposed friends, like Aaron. None of the conspiracies are successful however, which is unusual in the history of empires. Alexius survived all attempts on his life during his thirty-seven year reign. He died of a disease but not of treachery despite being surrounded by political intrigue his entire life.

A major theme of internal political conflict has to do with heretics, however. While the issue of heretical teachings is part of the theme of religious conflict, because Alexius is also the head of the Orthodox Church, heresy takes on a political element. Alexius rules in part due to the perception that God is with him. Successful challenges from heretics in his view threatened the social order. For this reason, Alexius is ruthless with heretics. While he learns how to argue with and refute them, attaining great skill at this craft, he kills many of the heretic leaders.

Surprisingly, he is able to convert thousands of Manicheans to Christianity but he had to crush the Bogomils. Perhaps the most gruesome and awful scene in the book comes when Anna describes the burning of the leader of the Bogomils, Basil. He was placed on a stake and burned alive, with Anna describing how his flesh appeared after being burned.



# Style

## Perspective

The Alexiad is the story of Alexius I Comnena's tenure as Emperor of the Byzantine Empire. It covers the events from his ascension all the way until his death. Initially, the events that transpired within his rule were recorded and organized by Alexius's son-in-law Caesar Nicephorus Bryennius, who was married to Alexius's daughter, Anna Comnena. When he dies, Anna Comnena takes over authorship of the book.

Anna Comnena was perhaps the most educated woman in the world during her day. She lives from 1083 to 1153 A.D. and was widely known as a scholar. As Alexius's oldest child, she had the opportunity to study Greek philosophy, history, math, science and even erotic poetry behind her parents' back. At age 55 Anna took up writing the Alexiad, turning Caesar's records and notes into a narrative which also included her own records and memories.

Anna maintains over and over again that she can write an impartial history of her father's life and rule without whitewashing anything he did. She argues that she loves the truth more than she loves her father and will always expose when he made a mistake. However, it is quite clear that she is strongly biased in his favor. She describes his political enemies as barbarians, records his 'brilliant' strategies, holds him to be a pious man despite his slaughter of thousands, praises his destruction of heretics who merely preached a different doctrine and played up his public penance as genuine. Any reader of the Alexiad must be fully aware that they are reading a strongly pro-Byzantine work. After all, Anna explicitly proclaims that her father is 'the thirteenth apostle.'

## Tone

The tone of The Alexiad varies somewhat between a paeon to Alexius Comnena and dry historical details. The book also takes on a highly personal tone in places, particularly when Anna is trying to convince the reader of her impartiality.

The fifteen books of the Alexiad record numerous events. These events range from battles with the Normans, Turks and other groups, to the details of the First Crusade. It discusses attempts to assassinate Alexius and his brutal persecution of heretics. From time to time, Anna will give detailed descriptions of the physical appearance and/or character of some major character in the book, such as Robert Guiscard or Bohemund of Antioch. She provides a detailed profile of her mother Irene and her grandmother Anna. These details are mostly dry and reports of events and details in quick succession. Much of the book reads like a mere summary of the events of Alexius's rule. And in a way, they are.

However, the book sometimes slows to describe some internal or emotional conflict. The reader is treated to Alexius's public confession of war crimes, the gruesome





execution of Basil, the leader of the Bogomils, a heretical Christian sect. Anna reports when her father was deeply worried about some person or event, the way in which he treated hostages with mercy and justice, and so on. Anna adores her mother and always speaks of her in the highest terms and when her father dies she goes into great detail about how great he was.

## Structure

The *Alexiad* runs over four hundred pages and has a winding narrative stretching across the entirety of Alexius Comnena's tenure as Emperor of the Byzantine Empire. Anna Comnena, his daughter, is the writer of the book and often takes detours and goes on tangents before returning to her main narrative. She provides important descriptions of characters, battles, etc. but they go on at great length.

The book is structured into fifteen minor books, and each of these books have numerous sections which somewhat neatly divide events. Book I explains how Alexius became general under the Emperor and explains the preparations for the Norman Invasion. Book II covers the revolt of Isaac and Alexius Comnena against the Emperor and Alexius's rise to power. Book III records problems with the Ducas family, and making preparations for war and alliances.

Book IV begins with Robert Guiscard of the Normans attacking Dyrachium and Alexius barely escaping with his life. Book V details Alexius's financial struggles due to the war, Bohemund's fight against Alexius, Alexius's victory and his persecution of the heretic John Italus. Book VI brings the War against Normans to an end. Robert Guiscard dies, and the Scythians prepare for war.

Book VII is about the War Against Scythians and Book VIII ends it. Book IX covers Alexius's conflict with Tzachas and the Dalmatians. Book X sees the quashing of more heretics and the launching of the First Crusade. Book XI records the First Crusade, including the conquest of Nicea, Antioch and Jerusalem. Bohemund makes trouble over Antioch but Alexius defeats him.

Book XII reviews domestic conflicts, and the Normans prepare for their second invasion. In Book XIII, Anna explains Alexius's defense against the second Normand Invasion which ends with the Treaty of Devol. The treaty ended the fight between Bohemund and Alexius.

Book XIV shows the rise of Turkish forces and continuing problems with the Franks. Alexius develops some health problems and uproots Manichean heretics. In Book XV, Alexius embarks on his last expeditions, crushes the Bogomil heretics makes peace with the Turks. The book ends with Alexius's last illness and death.



## Quotes

"Time in its irresistible and ceaseless flow carries along on its flood all created things, and drowns them in the depths of obscurity, no matter if they be quite unworthy of mention, or most noteworthy and important, and thus, as the tragedian says, 'he brings from the darkness all things to the birth, and all things born envelops in the night'." (1)

"It is high time I should turn to my father's reign and relate how and why he became ruler. ... I should not spare him for being my father if anything he did struck me as not well done; nor shall I gloss over his successes to avoid the under-current of suspicion that it is a daughter writing about her father, for in either case I should be wronging truth." (43)

"Let me do it, for through you God wishes to restore the dignity of our family." (60)

"Alexius saw that the Empire was nearly at its last gasp ..." (89)

"Do not grieve nor groan, to-morrow you shall conquer." (127)

"I found the Empire surrounded on all sides by barbarians and absolutely deficient in resources for opposing these enemies who were pressing hard upon her." (142)

"But at this point my soul is convulsed and filled with sorrow, for he was wise in counsel and a very distinguished orator." (170)

"That day a new spectacle was seen, for a whole nation, not of ten thousand men only, but surpassing all number together with their wives and children was completely wiped out." (205)

"Know, O Emperor, that I am the king of kings and the greatest of those under heaven; and it behoves you to meet and treat me on arrival with all pomp and in a manner worthy of my nobility." (253)

"Act for the future in whatever way you think best." (270)

"And indeed he always referred everything to the great providence of God." (309)

"For a Frank on horseback is invincible ..." (342)

"And, wherever I perceive that my father made a mistake, I unhesitatingly transgress the natural law and cling to the truth, for though I hold him dear, I hold the truth dearer still." (380-1).

"I for my part should call him 'the thirteenth apostle'. Although some ascribe this glory to Constantine the Great; yet I am of opinion that Alexius should be ranked equal to the Emperor Constantine or, to prevent contentiousness, let him be placed second to Constantine both as apostle and Emperor." (386)



"But when ... I touched it again and I recognized that all his strength was giving way and that the pulse in the arteries had finally stopped, then I bowed my head and, exhausted and fainting I looked down to the ground, said nothing, but clasped my hands over my face and stepped back and wept. The Empress understood what that meant and in absolute despair uttered a sudden loud, far-reaching shriek. How could I possibly picture the disaster which overtook the whole world?" (426)

"For, as he has gone, why am I still numbered among the living ...?" (427)



## Topics for Discussion

Do you think Anna is impartial? Why or why not? Give examples.

What do you think of Anna's defenses of her impartiality? Is she convincing? Why or why not?

Describe in detail the conflict between the Franks and their leaders (Robert and Bohemund) and Alexius.

What is the significance of the skirmishes with the Turks? List some of the relevant major conflicts and describe their historical significance.

To what extent does *The Alexiad* support the widespread view of Alexius's reign as the Komnenian Restoration of the Eastern Roman Empire?

To what extent is Christianity a genuine and important part of the book? Some might argue that the religion was merely a political matter for Alexius but others believed him to be pious. What do you think?

What do you think of Alexius? What was good about him? What was bad about him?