

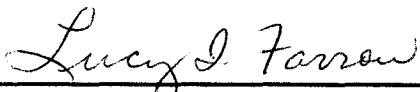
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Bohemond of Taranto: The Centrifugal Force of the First Crusade

By

Eli Jackson

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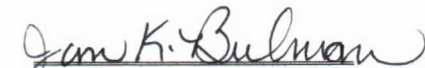
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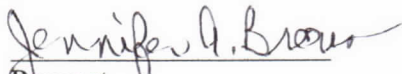
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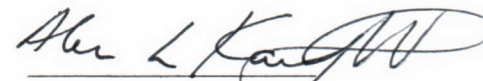

Second Reader

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1. Bohemond of Taranto

The most capable and imaginative general of the First Crusade (1095-1099) was christened 'Mark' at birth, though his father quickly dubbed him Bohemond, after the legendary giant *Buamundus gigas*. The giant spent his formative years with fellow southern Italian Normans in the service of, and on campaign with, his father, Robert Guiscard (c. 1015-1085), Duke of Apulia, who had been involved in a lengthy conflict with Byzantine forces under the beleaguered emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1048-1118).¹ For over a decade, Guiscard, the sixth son of Tancred of Hauteville (980-1041), from his Italian dominion, foraged deeper and deeper into Byzantine territory, as far as Dyrrhacium, causing the New Romans to shudder and his friends to believe him destined to wear the imperial purple. History would see to it that none of Hauteville's ancestors would ever sit upon the throne in Constantinople. Robert would not live long enough to chisel any more than a chink out of the armor of the eastern Empire. Bohemond, however, would prove to be the force of nature that shook the very foundations of the Byzantine world.

Outmanned, yet matching the moves of Alexius, step-for-step, Bohemond continued the fight against Alexius before eventually returning to the south of Italy, in April of 1083, where he discovered that he had been disinherited. Guiscard had cast aside Bohemond's mother, Alberada of Buonalbergo (c. 1033-1132), and had married

¹ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57.

Sichelgaita (1040-1090), the daughter of the Lombard prince of Salerno, after some clever maneuvering saw to it that his first marriage could be interpreted as illegal by degree of consanguinity. Bohemond's new stepmother, Sichelgaita, convinced his father to pass his inheritance to her son, Roger Borsa (c. 1060-1111). The new successor to the Guiscard lands was half Bohemond's age and possessed none of his martial capabilities.¹ As horrific as this slight must have seemed to Bohemond at the time, it would later serve to allow him to join the forthcoming crusading movement.

Almost all of the primary sources related to Bohemond detail the over-dramatic fashion in which he joined the First Crusade. Pope Urban II (1035-1099) had stated his case for the expedition in a field outside of the Cathedral at Clermont in 1095. Thousands of knights and peasants were already leaving their homes and livelihoods and making their way east, while Bohemond and his Normans were busy laying siege to Amalfi, a Byzantine town on the Gulf of Salerno, 20 miles southeast of Naples. Amalfi had been a maritime power since the ninth century and had served as an important port for centuries. The leader of the siege, Bohemond, recently rendered virtually penniless thanks to his disinheritance, put on quite a demonstration of piety as he witnessed the first waves of pilgrims-at-arms who were passing through the region. Inspired, Bohemond theatrically ripped his favorite cloak into cross-shaped strips, which he handed to his Norman followers, and he bade them "take up the cross" and follow him down the pilgrim road.²

The road to Jerusalem led first to Constantinople. Each magnate was called upon to lead his forces to the greatest Christian city on earth to attempt to organize the mass of

¹ Ibid., 59.

² Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 79.

armies, formulate plans, and to meet with Emperor Alexis. Though Bohemond no doubt understood that, somehow, the expedition would present an opportunity for him to attack the empire once again; all the sources indicate that by the time Bohemond neared the walls of Constantinople to gather with his fellow crusading magnates, he had decided to play the role of subservient vassal. “His attitude towards all the Byzantines seemed to be one of studied contempt,” writes Michael Foss.³ Though he adds, “day by day he [Bohemond] would play their games [the Byzantines’], if it pleased him.”⁴ When, in the spring of 1097, Alexius demanded the crusading princes swear an oath of fealty to him, Bohemond did more than oblige. The Norman became immediately determined to convince his fellow magnates to support the emperor and to take his pledge. Bohemond even threatened the expedition’s most famous and powerful magnate, Raymond of Toulouse, with violence if he refused the emperor his due.⁵

The crusaders began to trickle out of Constantinople in late April of 1097. Two months later, the Franks besieged the walled city of Nicaea, in Asia Minor. At the battle (1113), Bohemond all but secured a victory for the Christians, as he hurled the staple attack of the Normans at the Turkish commander, Kiliç Arslan: the cavalry charge.⁶ Following the battle, Bohemond played the liege-vassal game with Alexius for the final time. As the emperor rounded up all of the errant princes who had still not taken his oath, Bohemond publicly prodded his nephew, stubborn Tancred, to swear homage to Constantinople, which he finally did.⁷ Even the princes who had taken “the oath” did so begrudgingly. Major magnates felt as though they were Alexius’s equal and minor ones

³ Michael Foss, *People of the First Crusade* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1997), 106.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 87.

⁶ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 125.

⁷ Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 99.

wanted the chance to ascend to glory. Neither class of warrior was interested in even paying lip service to the idea of relinquishing booty to the emperor. Nevertheless, in the final weeks of June, the crusaders headed towards Antioch.

After surviving an ambush near Dorylaeum, where a Bohemond-led cavalry charge again won the day, the expedition arrived at Antioch in mid-October.⁸ The struggle for Antioch was the most important, politically, of Bohemond's career and the one in which he proved his worth as the true martial leader of the crusade. The crusade, for Bohemond, however, would end at Antioch. After months of planning, arguing, appeasing, and coalescing among the magnates over the Norman's desire to stay in Antioch, Bohemond remained in the city as prince while the others headed for Jerusalem. The Norman now had more to worry about than irritating fellow crusaders. He was, in claiming Antioch for his own, committing treason by violating his oath to Alexius. Breaking a feudal oath meant stripping away the very glue that held together the relationship between lord and vassal. Bohemond, after all, had no desire to relinquish anything to Constantinople, but, instead, became Antioch's overlord from 1098-1111.⁹

Bohemond's years as lord of Antioch proved to be the most tumultuous in his life. He languished in a Turkish prison for three years when captured, in 1099, after an ill-advised skirmish.¹⁰ He suffered a disastrous defeat at the hands of the Seljuk Turks, along the banks of the Euphrates, in 1104. He took a recruiting trip across Western Europe and garnered support for a crusade of his own, which was intended to push the Turks back from his Antiochene doorstep and, more importantly, to attack the Byzantine

⁸ John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 170.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹⁰ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades Vol. 1: The First Crusades and the Foundations of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 322.

empire once again.¹¹ Bohemond never returned to the Levant with his newly recruited army of 34,000, to defend Antioch. Instead, he used it to attack Alexius at the Byzantine city of Dyrrhachium (1107), where he was ultimately defeated. This would be the Norman's final battle and the source of his greatest shame.¹² When he was brought before his old enemy, Bohemond was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Devol (1108.) The treaty made the prince a vassal of Alexius, forced him to turn over all conquered territories to the Empire, and required him to admit a Greek patriarch into Antioch to join Bohemond's own Latin bishops. Politically and militarily, Bohemond was a broken man. He died without ever returning to the East.

The first western invasion of Outremer was the only such expedition that could claim any measure of success and this is, in part, due to the men who ran it. They were often selfish, wildly ambitious, and eager to prove more bloodthirsty even than their peers. No kings set out on this crusade, unlike some famous campaigns to follow, nor did many piously penitent evangelicals or radicals. This is not to say that the magnates did not take seriously their charge of fulfilling the duties of their pilgrimages. They did, to a man. Even Bohemond, who travelled with his fellow princes only as far as Antioch, eventually fulfilled his vow to reach the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The First Crusade was, however, a venture led by nobles who were out to create a legacy, or to claim an eastern kingdom of their own, and they were prepared to do whatever it took to accomplish these goals – even work together.

This study will argue that Bohemond was not only the most important leader of the First Crusade, but also that he was also the body around which the whole crusading

¹¹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 137.

¹² Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 191.

movement orbited. This paper will also examine the ways that Alexius and the Byzantines, the Papacy, and Bohemond's fellow magnates each obsessed over the Norman who emerged as the centrifugal force on the crusade. Additionally, this work will detail the factors that allowed Bohemond to manipulate the direction of the crusade to his own advantage.

Emperor Alexius, who first wrote to Pope Urban to suggest a call-to-arms, was obsessed with Bohemond and his family for years before the crusade, as the Norman threatened to sweep his empire out from under him. After Bohemond took up the cross, and was approaching Constantinople, the Byzantine preoccupation with the Norman reached its zenith. The bitterness, which years of warfare between Norman and emperor had caused, had to be cast aside when Bohemond made his pilgrim's vow. Alexius needed Bohemond's prowess and leadership in the venture to come. Alexius sent several envoys out to meet his rival and to monitor his every move.¹³ Within the walls of Constantinople, the emperor teased Bohemond with booty to ensure his favor. Fittingly, after the emperor left the crusaders to fend for themselves at the gates of Nicaea, Bohemond broke his oath, more dramatically than would any other magnate, and claimed Antioch for himself.

As Alexius, the rival, wanted to use Bohemond for his own purposes, Urban, the ally, seems to have included the Norman in several policy-making decisions and given credence to his advice. The papacy had fallen under considerable duress in the years leading up to the First Crusade. Struggles over temporal dominion strained relations between the papacy and the German Empire to the point that the Holy Roman Emperor,

¹³ Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, trans., *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 29-31.

Henry IV (1050-1106), had established a rival pope seated in Ravenna. Following several unresolved disputes, King Phillip I (1052-1108) of France had also aligned himself against Urban. In the midst of the unsettled landscape, Urban had always counted on the southern Italian Norman armies for protection and even guidance. As Urban previously had contracted Guiscard as a retainer, the embattled pope also looked to employ Bohemond. After distinguishing Bohemond as a rear-vassal, Urban actually sought and gained refuge with the Norman in southern Italy.¹⁴ Bohemond first received the pope at Bari in 1089, in part so that Pope Urban could bless the church, and then at Taranto in 1092.¹⁵ Four church councils, which were held during the pontificate of Urban, took place in Bohemond's dominions. Urban may have even felt comfortable enough with Bohemond's extensive campaigning experience to ask the prince whether the Church should sanction Peter the Hermit's crusade. Peter, the eccentric tramp who led the ill-fated People's Crusade, did not pilot the sort of army that the papacy had expected to unleash upon the Saracens. Instead of wealthy warlords from noble families leading armed tenants, as Urban had expected, Peter hurried a disheveled peasant army to the east. It is no wonder that Urban looked to his trusted warlord, Bohemond, for counsel. Just how much advice the pope received from his vassal is unclear. It is certain, however, that Bohemond had the full support of the papacy as he marched east with his gathered army. Whether or not, as William of Malmesbury suggests, the entire crusade was plotted, merely, as a way for a clerically sponsored Bohemond to attack the Byzantine Empire is as unknown as it is far-fetched.¹⁶

¹⁴ France, *Victory*, 82.

¹⁵ G.A. Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131.

¹⁶ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 61.

Though he commanded a smaller force than did any of his fellow magnates, it soon became apparent that all crusading parties would look to Bohemond for guidance. Godfrey of Lorraine seriously considered placing the larger goal of besieging Jerusalem on hold and turning on the imperial city itself, at the behest of the Norman. Bohemond encouraged stubborn Raymond of Toulouse and other unknown princes, even at sword-point, to take the oath to Alexius and cooperate. The emperor's oath was one in which the crusading princes were familiar. They were asked to swear the type of homage western vassals typically pledged to their lords. There would be no tracts of land granted to the Frankish lords in return, however.¹⁷ Fealty to Alexius was a one-way street. Bohemond was anxious to have his fellow magnates take the oath to push the process along and see the crusading companies cross the Bosphorus. The sooner that happened, the quicker Bohemond could break the oath and claim sovereignty for himself. Bohemond was, probably, also eager to have Alexius witness him champion the oath, partly to ease the tension between the two after their years of struggle, and partly because Bohemond understood that early, imperial aid would ensure the venture did not fail before it began.

This paper will also analyze several of Bohemond's key experiences which allowed him to garner such attention from Alexius, the papacy, and the crusading magnates alike. First, Bohemond was rooted in a background of martial competence and success. He grew up watching his father undertake lengthy campaigns away from home, win towns through siege battles, and fight like a true Norman equestrian – models that would serve him well in his expedition to Outremer.¹⁸ The Norman was also innately

¹⁷ France, *Victory*, 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 77-79.

aware, in each of his engagements of the First Crusade, of when a decisive, turning-point knockout blow was needed and how, and when, it needed to be delivered. In a majority of the battles that he either led or co-led, Bohemond would ride behind his men in reserve of his forces.¹⁹ From this position, Bohemond launched several rear-borne charges into the fray, turning the tide of battle. Second, Bohemond was in a unique position to understand how both enemies, Muslim and Byzantine, which he would face in his lifetime fought. He battled against, or alongside, both Muslim and Byzantine troops while on campaign with his father. No other prince of the crusade could make such a claim. Third, Bohemond's disinheritance situation at home left him desperate for both territory and renown.²⁰ His pre-crusade inheritance slight propelled him towards ferocious ambition on the road to Antioch. Fourth, Bohemond was perceptive enough to know how to get what he wanted from any potential employer, no matter how awkward the arrangement. Urban and Alexius, of course, just happened to be the two individuals who were responsible for calling the faithful to crusade. Bohemond had met Pope Urban II on at least three occasions, prompting the chronicler William of Malmesbury to suggest that the crusade was to be a Bohemond-Urban conspiracy to spur a new Balkan campaign that was designed to wrest the region from imperial control.²¹

The sources that detail the career of Bohemond are not lacking. The treasures each one offers the historian, however, are balanced by problems. In four sources, to be detailed below, eyewitnesses offer firsthand accounts of particular aspects of the First Crusade. Students of Bohemond are lucky in that one of the chroniclers, the anonymous

¹⁹ Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 221.

²⁰ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusaders, 1095-1131* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 18.

²¹ France, *Victory*, 82-84.

author of the *Gesta Francorum*, was a member of the Norman's entourage from its inception to Antioch.²² A second reporter, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor himself, cannot hide her strange mix of ire and attraction for Bohemond and her barbaric villain graces her pages more than any other crusader.

Guibert of Nogent's (c. 1055-1124), *Dei gesta per Francos (God's deeds through the Franks)* was finished in 1108. Modern historians have praised his writing style and the original insights into the crusading period that he provides. Though his work is but a summary of the *Gesta Francorum*, written by an anonymous Norman author who spent a large part of the First Crusade with Bohemond, Guibert weaves the tales of actual crusaders, which he knew and talked with, into his account. Guibert lived, and died, virtually unknown in the literary circles of his time. Only recently, have scholars come to appreciate the glimpses into medieval life that his works offer.²³

Ralph of Caen's (c. 1079-1130), *Gesta Tancredi in Expeditione Hierosolymitana (The Deeds of Tancred in the Crusade)* was finished in 1112 after the death of Bohemond's nephew, and fellow-crusader, Tancred. Ralph probably wanted to avoid being accused of flattery towards his patron. The work is a firsthand account of the crusading years 1096-1105, in general, and the actions of Tancred and Bohemond, in particular. Ralph's crusading résumé is second-to-none. During the First Crusade, Ralph served as Bohemond's chaplain and later took service with Tancred when he ruled the principality of Antioch (1108-1112.) In his early life, at home in Caen, Normandy, Ralph was a student of Arnulf of Chocques, who would later become the Latin Patriarch of

²² Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea*, 61.

²³ Robert Levine, trans., *The Deeds of God Through the Franks* (Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2003-2009), <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/8dced10.txt/> (accessed April 12, 2009).

Jerusalem. Ralph opens his chronicle with a eulogy for his beloved Bohemond that serves as a perfect example for the sort of flattery he bestows throughout the work:

There was in those days a hero of great stature whose youth was discussed above. That was Bohemond; the son of that distinguished soldier Robert surnamed Guiscard, who was a vigorous emulator of his father's daring. The same apostolic sermon that stirred the princes of the world to free Jerusalem from the yoke of the infidels also moved him.²⁴

Note that Ralph takes care to insist that the Norman was indeed as moved by Christian piety as the other magnates.

Anna Comnena (1083-1155), who wrote the *Alexiad*, offers an unapologetically biased account of the First Crusade and how it affected the life and reign of her father, Byzantine emperor Alexius I. The princess did not write as an eyewitness, as the events she recorded happened when she was a child. As she relates her father's experiences with the westerners, she praises the emperor unconditionally and denigrates his Frankish rivals. The *Alexiad* is of great value to the historian as it is the only account of the Crusades written from a Hellenic perspective. The Byzantine ruling class and its mindset concerning the crusades is wonderfully represented, and not only because the emperor's daughter is the author. Anna's husband, Nikephorus Bryennios (1062-1137), fought in a skirmish with crusader Godfrey of Bouillon outside the walls of Constantinople in 1097; this episode added a unique perspective to the *Alexiad*'s conveyance of the alarm many Byzantines felt as the western hordes descended on their capital. Anna's writing reserves a special spot for Bohemond (her true villain) of whom she cannot seem to speak enough. She considers the Norman a rogue and a scoundrel for his earlier campaigns in which he

²⁴ Bachrach and Bachrach, *Gesta Tancredi*, 23.

fought against her father's forces, mistrusts his every move while near Constantinople, and yet spares curiously little detail while describing his impressive personal appearance.²⁵

Peter Tudebode was a Poitevin priest who followed the First Crusade, probably with the army of the count of Toulouse. His *Historia de Hierosolymitano Itinere* (1111-1130) offers valuable eyewitness insight into events such as the siege of Antioch.

The so-called *De Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum* (*The Deeds of the Franks and the Other Pilgrims to Jerusalem*) is a chronicle of the First Crusade written by an anonymous author connected with Bohemond around 1100. It narrates the events of the First Crusade from its inception in November 1095 to the Battle of Ascalon in August 1099. Bohemond, probably in Apulia, recruited the author, either Norman or Italian, and then, after Bohemond took over Antioch, joined the entourage of Raymond of Toulouse. The source is obviously problematic, for the author writes to please his patron and to exaggerate his deeds, but he provides an incredible account of a knight not connected with the Church. Historians view the *Gesta's* most important historical contribution as the day-to-day events of the journey it provides: the tactical operations, provisioning, changing moods of the crusaders, and the expressed anti-Greek prejudices.²⁶

Two other primary accounts serve this paper. Albert (1100-?) of Aix's *Historia Hierosolymita* is a history of the Crusades to 1120 and is based on eyewitness accounts. Though his work is helpful in places relating to Bohemond and the princes of the First

²⁵ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans., Elizabeth A. Dawes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992).

²⁶ "Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum," in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans. August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 24-241.

Crusade, it is the main source for the earlier Popular (or People's) Crusade led by the ill-fated Peter the Hermit (c. 1050-1115).²⁷ Raymond of Aguiliers's *Historia Francorum qui ceperunt Iherusalem* is one of the major early sources for the First Crusade.²⁸ As a participant of the expedition traveling with the Provençal army of crusaders led by count Raymond of Toulouse, his description of the sieges and captures of Antioch and Jerusalem are among the most detailed accounts of these events.

In terms of secondary sources, this paper has attempted to make use of the leading, modern historians of the crusading era. Jonathan Riley-Smith's works are utilized, as are those of Thomas Asbridge. Former Cambridge professor Riley-Smith founded the Society for the Study of the Crusades and the Latin East. Asbridge is a medieval history scholar at the University of London. General surveys by the important Thomas F. Madden and Steven Runciman are also utilized. Madden, one of the world's leading crusade historians, is the Director of the Crusades Studies Forum and the Medieval Italy Prosopographical Database Project, at Saint Louis University. Runciman, the English medievalist, specialized in Byzantium studies. His most famous work was his three volume *A History of the Crusades* (1951-1954).

The scholars included in this bibliography understand the crusades as a topic in which lay interest is destined to grow. The medieval understanding of jihad, and the cross-cultural confusion that went along with it, has become as prevalent as ever in today's society. Many Americans felt uneasy when President Bush referred to the new

²⁷ Albert of Aix, *Historia Hierosolymita*, in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans., August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921). 24-241.

²⁸ Raymond of Aguiliers, *Historia francorum qui ceperint Jerusalem*, in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans., August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 103-105.

War on Terror as a “crusade” that was “gonna take a while,” but were unsure why. Interest in Bohemond, specifically, has also reemerged of late. The July 2010 issue of *Speculum* magazine includes an article by Paul L. Nicholas, “A Warlord’s Wisdom: Literacy and Propaganda at the Time of the First Crusade,”²⁹ which examines Bohemond’s use of propaganda and his mastery of persuasion. Common assumptions take for granted that the vast majority of crusaders took the cross out of faith and for purely reasons of religious conviction. A study of Bohemond shows a crusading leader who participated out of different motivations, but who, nonetheless, presents a model of how medieval military incursions, (whether inspired, barbarian, or both,) could be successful.

²⁹ Paul L. Nicholas, “A Warlord’s Wisdom: Literacy and Propaganda at the Time of the First Crusade,” *Speculum* 85, no.3 (2010): 534-566.

2. Bane of the Byzantines

This chapter will discuss Bohemond's early martial life, which was spent in the service of his father's southern Italian Norman forces waging war against the Byzantine Empire. From an early age, Bohemond's name and growing legacy would be made known in the Empire and symbolize a real threat.¹ Bohemond's actions in the service of his father would reserve him a spot in the psyche of the eastern emperor, Alexius I, one of the figures examined in this paper in regards to his obsession with Bohemond.

In March 1081, Robert Guiscard, Bohemond's father, mounted his final campaign against the Byzantine Empire, with Bohemond serving as deputy-commander.² Bohemond led the vanguard of the Norman horde across the Straits of Otranto and into the Albanian city of Avlona, which quickly fell before him. Robert's eyes then turned towards the greatest Greek city on the Adriatic, Dyrrhachium (Durazzo), a city name that in Greek means "bad spine," probably for the jagged cliffs around the city. A new warrior-usurper, Alexius Comnenus, had recently claimed the throne in Constantinople and decided that his first priority would be to check the Norman advance from the west. Comnenus massed his superior forces in protection of the port city and in October 1081 met the Normans head on. With Bohemond commanding Guiscard's left flank, the Normans routed the imperial forces. The mercenaries lucky enough to escape with Alexius were the only ones left un-massacred.³

¹ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 81.

² Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 57.

³ *Ibid.*, 59.

With Dyrrhacium and most of northern Greece in his hands, Guiscard must have felt that by winter, he and his men would be dining in the palaces of Constantinople. Bohemond may have learned more about war from his father during the siege of Dyrrhacium than in any other battle.⁴ Guiscard had orchestrated something of a betrayal from within the city to help usher about its fall, a move that Bohemond would remember when later camped outside the gates of Antioch. Guiscard's stern leadership style also influenced Bohemond's demeanor and so did his father's flair for the orchestration of desperate moves under pressure. On the eve of Guiscard's first major engagement with the Byzantines, he had his own fleet burned, barring the door to escape.⁵ On a more practical note, Guiscard also taught Bohemond the value of naval support and provisions, necessities with which Bohemond would save the First Crusade before its first major engagement at Nicaea.

Matters back in Italy forced Robert to return west and he left Bohemond in sole command of his forces. Guiscard probably ordered his son to consolidate the gains they had already made before pushing as far east as possible. Robert may have even held out faith that Bohemond could storm Constantinople itself. Alexia Comnena, the daughter of the new Byzantine emperor, leaves us her account of Robert's parting words to his son. She has Guiscard instruct his son not to "play the master" alone, but to follow the sage advice of his officers. Bohemond is also given a warning of just how formidable a foe Emperor Alexius can be:

"Therefore, take care lest by gaining a respite he should recover and resist you more bravely than before. For he is not one of the common herd, but has been

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 57.

nurtured from childhood on wars and battles, he has travelled over the whole of the East and the West, and how many rebels he hunted down and brought back captive to the preceding emperors, you can learn yourself from many informants. Therefore, if you lose heart at all and do not march against him with firm resolve you will lose all that I personally have won by great effort, and you yourself will undoubtedly reap the fruits of your own laziness.”⁶

In other words, Guiscard warned his son that Emperor Alexius was very much like himself: a man reared in martial excellence.

With Robert away, Bohemond ventured deep into the region of Thessaly, which is located in northern Greece. Rodney Stark comments on Bohemond’s time in control of the southern Italian forces:

“Although still in his early twenties, Bohemond proved a brilliant leader,” especially gifted at recognizing and countering enemy tactics, and he defeated Alexius in two battles, thus putting the Normans in control of Macedonia and nearly all of Thessaly. At this point Alexius managed to convince the Seljuk Turks that the Normans were a threat to them, too, and so, with a new army including thousands of Turks, Alexius was barely able to defeat the Normans at Larissa.”⁷

For the next couple of decades, the emperor’s preoccupation with his Norman nemesis would continue to foster.

Men grew weary from months of toil and the rugged Grecian landscape and many deserted. Nonetheless, the Normans managed to inflict two defeats upon the Byzantines

⁶ Anna Comnena , *The Alexiad*, trans., Elizabeth A. Dawes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992), 121-122.

⁷ Rodney Stark, *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 134.

that would hurt their prestige in the region for years to come.⁸ Bohemond managed to keep the brunt of the force intact as far as Larissa, the capital of Thessaly, before he met a challenge from Alexius that would prove to be too much. He gave up the siege of Larissa after six grueling months. In April of 1083, Bohemond returned to Italy to face his father. The emperor's daughter leaves us her version of the father-son meeting and explains that the elder Guiscard looked as though he had been "struck by lightning." The old warrior was dazed, but undaunted.⁹

Guiscard was not one to let a setback interfere with his goals and his son would later continue this legacy, sometimes with reckless abandon. The Guiscard company resumed its foray into Byzantine territory the following year, this time with Roger Borsa, Robert's newly chosen heir, and with Robert's youngest son, Guy of Hauteville, who accompanied them. Though Roger would always symbolize betrayal for Bohemond, who felt he had been slighted by an unequal, Guy would prove his loyalty to his elder stepbrother throughout his career.¹⁰ This ill-fated expedition faded quickly, however, as Bohemond grew ill and withdrew to Puglia (in the boot heel of Italy) to recover.

With certainty, only two things are known about the next decade of Bohemond's life. First, while dealing with his father's succession crisis (Robert died in July of 1085), Bohemond sought and received help from Pope Urban II in consolidating his claim to a small piece of his father's southern Italian possessions: the cities Taranto and Otranto. With the help of cousin Jordan of Capua, Bohemond took up arms against his half-brother and took these two cities as well as Oria. Peace was made and Bohemond and

⁸ John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 77.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 59.

Roger Borsa ruled the territories together until Bohemond persuaded Borsa's own nobles to side with him and he took Taranto for himself. Second, he probably survived an attempted poisoning that was ordered by his stepmother, Sichelgaita, who was angry over Bohemond's ongoing conflict with Roger over his inheritance.¹¹ Though Bohemond kept the title, Prince of Taranto, for the rest of his career, the adventurer spent considerable time searching for a less-modest label to win.¹²

Bohemond matured into adulthood believing that the throne in Constantinople was the ultimate prize worth seeking and that it was ordained that a Norman from the House of Hauteville should claim it.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹² *Ibid.*.

3. Answering the Call

This chapter will inspect the entry of Bohemond into the pilgrim ranks of the First Crusade. Bohemond made the trek to Constantinople and eventually crossed the Bosphorus into Muslim lands and emerged as the centrifugal figure around which all pieces of the expedition began to revolve. Although the First Crusade commenced with no formal commander-in-chief among the Franks, Bohemond attracted the most attention from Alexius from beginning to end.

The pilgrim hordes who were answering the pope's call for the First Crusade and making their way to Constantinople left quite an impression on Bohemond. The Norman inquired, excitedly, where these minor princes, knights, and infantrymen were going and for what purpose. Bohemond doubtlessly looked for an opportunity to return to imperial lands with his own force, which, coupled with these masses, could make quite a dent in Alexius's armor. With his ambition and martial skill, Bohemond probably understood that he could even wind up as a major leader of this crusade.¹ Robert the Monk tries to give form to Bohemond's thoughts as he writes of the dazzling array of knights and footmen, their weapons glittering in the sunlight. He is also careful to inform us that Bohemond had no idea of just what the growing excitement was all about:

“Asking what symbol of pilgrimage they wore, he was told that they bore the Holy Cross either on their forehead or on their right shoulders. When they were training for battle across the fields and turning their lances in mock fight on each

¹ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2-3.

other, all shouted with one voice 'God wills it! God wills it!' This was their war cry. When Bohemond, a sharp and intelligent man, heard this further information, he praised God more and more, realizing that this could not be the work of men alone."²

Bohemond's fervor must have been radiant, no matter how much Robert exaggerated it. This enthusiasm, coupled with the dramatic fashion in which he joined the crusade, can only mean that he saw an opportunity for self-service in this venture.

The anonymous writer of the *Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum* corroborates and gives us our first glimpse of the Norman ripping his coat into the shapes of crosses and distributing them to his flock:

"'God wills it! God wills it! God wills it!' they shout in truth with one voice." Moved straightway by the Holy Spirit, he ordered the most precious cloak, which he had with him cut to pieces, and straightway he had the whole of it made into crosses. Thereupon, most of the knights engaged in that siege rushed eagerly to him, so that Count Roger remained almost alone."³

The quotations above offer a clear picture of a warrior who was overcome by either a devout fervor, excitement about an opportunity for redemption, or both.

As if on a whim, Bohemond rallied his Norman knights and abruptly broke away from Amalfi. Before glory could be won in the Levant, an awkward rendezvous in Constantinople with his old enemy Alexius was in order. All the major crusade leaders

² "Robert the Monk's History of the First Crusade," in *Historia Iherosolimitana: Crusade Texts in Translation*, ed. Carol Sweetenham (NY: Ashgate Publishing, 2006), 92.

³ "Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum," in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans., August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 62-64.

were to meet with Emperor Alexius in Constantinople to discuss plans and compensation before crossing into Asia Minor. Crossing Byzantine lands and securing an audience with Alexius would require some careful planning for one who had who had spent the past decade working to destroy the Byzantine Empire.⁴ Indeed, no other western name was as well known in Byzantium as that of Bohemond, who brought with him a resume fit for a crusade leader.⁵ He knew the Greeks well enough, as he had defeated them twice. He understood much about the Muslim warriors, as well: the Byzantines regularly made use of Saracen infantry troops, and Robert Guiscard's own army was often stocked with Muslim archers.⁶ Moreover, Bohemond, along with Robert of Normandy, was one of only two princes to have previously commanded a great army in the field. In the First Crusade, Bohemond commanded the smallest, but the most cohesive and compact force by far; it was comprised of southern Italian Normans and a trickling of French knights who had migrated into southern Italy as the movement gathered momentum.⁷

Even with his experience, Bohemond's recruitment into the crusade, indeed his very presence amongst the Franks, threatened to undermine the critical Latin-Byzantium coalition that seemed to be gaining substance. He carried with him shadowy, former dealings with Pope Urban II (the reader will remember the times when Urban traveled throughout the south of Italy and even met with Bohemond, causing William of Malmesbury to state that the First Crusade was entirely invented by the pope and the Norman) and a vendetta of his own against the Byzantine Empire, for he had spent his young life pitted against it on the field. On the other hand, Bohemond's involvement not

⁴ John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 103.

⁵ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 80.

⁶ France, *Victory*, 79.

⁷ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 35.

only ensured that his highly trained knights would enter the fray, but also introduced a figure indispensable in his own right: Tancred, Bohemond's stubborn but talented nephew who would later twice govern Antioch for his uncle while Bohemond was away.⁸ Additionally, Tancred could speak Arabic, a fact that added to the value of Bohemond's retinue and ensured Tancred the spot of second-in-command.⁹ Others, including the monk William of Malmesbury, have even suggested that the entire crusade was little more than a plot cooked up by Pope Urban II at the behest of Bohemond, who wanted to spur on another Balkan campaign against Alexius.¹⁰ As far-fetched as the suggestion remains, taking into account Bohemond's self-indulgent showing at Amalfi, it does seem, based on his subsequent dealings with the papacy, that he considered himself a sort of vassal of the pope. Of course, selfish interests guided Bohemond's decision to join the First Crusade as well. No one involved doubted his eagerness to carve out a territory for himself at the expense of the Greek "allies" who had overtaken the lands he had been so close to conquering in Albania.

In any case, four main crusader armies left their respective regions in Europe around August of 1096. Urban had set the date for Christendom to head east on August 15. They converged, by different routes, in Constantinople between November of 1096 and April of 1097. Hugh of Vermandois, the brother of the French king, was the first to arrive. En route, he had sent a message to Alexius bidding him to ready his city for the arrival of the "king of kings." Hugh was then shipwrecked, rescued by the imperial coastguard, and briefly detained by Alexius.

⁸ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁰ France, *Victory*, 84.

About the same time as Hugh, Godfrey of Lorraine made his way to the imperial city. Godfrey's fame as a powerful magnate was more widespread than any crusader. Upon reaching Byzantine lands in late November, and hearing of Hugh's capture, Godfrey allowed his charges to pillage the region a bit until Hugh was released. Bohemond left southern Italy a fortnight after Godfrey for his 178-day trip. Boarding his forces onto ships at Bari, he first sailed for the Bulgarian coast before making the final push to Constantinople. Raymond of Toulouse, the most powerful prince who had taken up the cross, was the last to leave Western Europe. Raymond, the most familiar of all princes with Bohemond's reputation, was, actually, family. The second of his three wives was Bohemond's niece.¹¹

Before reaching the city, each lord learned of the emperor's desire to have the westerners swear an oath of fealty to him. Months earlier, the People's Crusade (so-called because the peasant rabble led by Peter the Hermit had assembled earlier than the papacy had intended) had lumbered their way through Constantinople and had left a trail of devastation and death in their wake, before being slaughtered by the first Turkish army they encountered. Alexius was excited to deal with the professional crusader horde and to have it pay homage to him. The oath was very similar to what the Latins were accustomed to in any feudal state. The vassals would be the lord's "man," but were promised no fief of any kind in return.¹² Bohemond, for one, may have had other ideas on this point. Whether he sought, from the beginning, to ignore his imperial oath and

¹¹ France, *Victory*, 83-84.

¹² *Ibid.*, 111.

seize the best dominion he could find, or was actually ready to “interview” for a martial position within the empire, is unclear.¹³

We do not know what kind of plan Bohemond had as he led his army east. His army did find, unsurprisingly, some trouble as they trekked across Eastern Europe, where they lived off of the land and the goodwill of their fellow Christians. Bohemond sensationally commanded his men to leave the countryside as they found it and to behave in a Christ-like fashion.¹⁴ The command was ignored at least once. In Pelagonia, today a plain shared by Macedonia and Greece, Bohemond’s army took the time to attack a fortified town of “heretics [probably Cathars];” steal all their cattle, horses, and asses; set fire to the town; and kill all of its inhabitants.¹⁵

"Seigniors, take heed all of you, for we are pilgrims of God. We ought, therefore, to be better and more humble than before. Do not plunder this land, since it belongs to Christians, and let no one, at the cost of blessing, take more than he needs to eat." ¹⁶

The author of the *Gesta* here describes Bohemond’s good-natured eastern trek and the instructions he gave to his men regarding proper conduct.

Continuing across the Balkans, Bohemond may have wanted to determine how Alexius would deal with the other lords who had already arrived.¹⁷ The prince may have even, incredibly, tried to open up a line of communication with Godfrey of Bouillon, to suggest that they join forces and attack Alexius immediately.¹⁸ In fact, Albert of Aix

¹³ Jean Richard, *The Crusades, c.1071-c.1291* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 46.

¹⁴ Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 80.

¹⁵ Richard, *The Crusades*, 42.

¹⁶ “Gesta francorum,” 62-64.

¹⁷ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

describes the assurances that Bohemond's legates delivered to Godfrey and the duke's pious reply:

“You may be certain that this same Bohemund will come to your aid with all his troops early in the month of March, to attack the Emperor and to invade his kingdom.” After he had heard the message of Bohemund, the Duke put off answering it until the next day. Then, upon the counsel of his followers, he replied that neither for gain nor for the destruction of Christians had he left his country and kindred, but, rather, in the name of Christ to pursue the way to Jerusalem.”¹⁹

Jean Richard can find no reason to suggest that Bohemond would approach Godfrey about such a union. He suggests that Bohemond “has been credited with many things,” after all, “but his attitude at this point in the campaign [one of benevolence towards the emperor] hardly supports this interpretation.”²⁰

The two chroniclers most favorable to Bohemond, Guibert of Nogent and the author of the *Gesta*, detail a strange story that involves the emperor's troops actually riding to attack a portion of the army travelling behind Bohemond. Both accounts describe Tancred rushing towards the imperial foe, splashing across a river to smite as many of the enemy as he can, before seeing to it that the defeated prisoners were carried, in chains, to Bohemond.²¹ The sources also make sure to illuminate the mercy the prince bestowed upon the Byzantines, even going so far as to assure them that he had no plans to dethrone their emperor. Bohemond led a large part of his force in reconnaissance,

¹⁹ Albert of Aix, *Historia Hierosolymita*, in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans., August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 80-86.

²⁰ Richard, *Crusades*, 45.

²¹ Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, trans., *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 24-25.

leaving the rest behind with an unnamed count. Some part of the Byzantine army moved to attack the count. Guibert of Nogent describes the scene:

“When brave Tancred heard of this, he swiftly turned back, leaped into the river
To them the prince said, "Why do you pursue my people, the people of Christ? I
am not trying to overthrow your emperor.” They replied, "We do nothing by our
own deliberation. We are soldiers who earn money by carrying out the orders of
the emperor; whatever he tells us to do we do.” When the splendid man heard
this, he let them go, without punishment and without ransom.”²²

Alexius’s messengers, who were revealed as nothing more than mercenaries, returned with sobering news for the emperor and Ralph of Caen details the amazing report they give regarding the amassed strength of Bohemond. “All of Gaul has been roused,” he reports, as the mighty “Bohemond has arrived.” The Norman contingent’s soldiers, archers, and slingers made up a force so large that no “bread on this side of the sea” was sufficient to sustain them.²³

After a lifetime of making war against the Empire, the time had come. Bohemond left the brunt of his army with Tancred, hastily celebrated Easter near Roussa, and rode on to Constantinople to face his lifelong enemy.²⁴ Ralph of Caen leaves us his summary of a welcoming letter Alexius sent to the approaching Bohemond. Apparently, the emperor had decided it was best to play the role of father figure and attempt to harness the strength and popularity of the prodigal son for his own purposes. Note the manner in

²² Robert Levine, trans., *The Deeds of God Through the Franks* (Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2003-2009), <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/8deed10.txt/> (accessed April 12, 2009).

²³ Bachrach and Bachrach, *Gesta Tancredi*, 30.

²⁴ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 106.

which he glosses over the previous issues the two have had, while still leaving the matters dangling:

“King Alexios to Bohemond, greetings. I have received news of your arrival with paternal pleasure since you have now undertaken a task worthy of your heritage by turning your eagerness for war against the barbarians. As I see it, God has favoured the undertaking of the Franks since he undertook to strengthen them with such a great companion. Your approach promises in its own right an answer to my desires. For although I remain silent on other matters, the very prophets of the Turks foretell your victory over their people. It is well, therefore, for you to hurry my son, and by coming thereby bring an end to the delays of those leaders here with me who await you. The leaders and the magnates and all the people await you.”²⁵

It was probably fortuitous for the emperor that he, who Emperor Alexius had called his “son,” arrived after the other powerful princes. Fighting had broken out, off and on, between the Franks and the Byzantines over provisions and because of the general lack of tact on the part of the uncouth Franks, whom the Byzantines must have regarded as little more than a barbarous, although fearsome-looking, rabble.

Bohemond had missed the mischief. To say, however, that the Norman’s own forces eagerly awaited Bohemond’s arrival was an understatement. Upon catching a glance of their leader, Bohemond’s men rushed to him in unbridled joy. The speech he gave, no matter how exaggeratedly aided by the words of Ralph of Caen, challenges the notion that the prince signed on for the venture for purely secular reasons:

²⁵ Bachrach and Bachrach, *Gesta Tancredi*, 30.

“What an order of soldiers, three and four times blessed! Until now, you were stained with the blood of killing; now you are crowned with heavenly laurels like the martyrs through the sweat of the saints. Until now, you have stood out as an incitement of God’s anger; but now you are the reconciliation of his grace and the rampart of his faith. So with all this in mind, undefeated soldiers as you are, now that we start for the first time to fight for God, let us not glory in our arms or our strength, but in God who is more powerful than all, because the battle is the Lord’s and he is the governor among the nations.”²⁶

The emperor’s daughter, however, was probably equally correct in her take on Bohemond’s ambitious desires. The Count of Taranto came only in hopes that he might be able to “seize the capital itself,” while “cherishing his old grudge against the Emperor.”²⁷

Anna wants to make certain her readers understand that Bohemond’s sole reason for taking the cross was to find a way to claim the imperial throne. She even explains that her father wanted to pull Bohemond away from the other magnates, have him take his oath, and push him across the Bosphorus before he could corrupt the minds of the other Franks:

“Thus having heard what Bohemund had to say, he [Alexius] hoped to persuade him to cross before the others came, lest, joined with them after their coming, he might pervert their minds.”²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., 98.

²⁷ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans., Elizabeth A. Dawes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992), 264-266.

²⁸ Ibid.

Anna's quote, here, highlights the pull which the Byzantines knew Bohemond had over the other princes. Even being around the Norman in Constantinople would be an unwelcome chance to have minds "perverted."

Despite the complications involved in accepting the *Alexiad* as a trustworthy source, this aspect of Anna's hindsight seems hard to refute, understanding that Bohemond may have already tried to convince the likes of Godfrey that the throne was attainable. The *Gesta* hints that Alexius promised Bohemond some land if he would take the oath and make a vow of his own: to aid the pilgrims by land and sea and see to it that they reached the Holy Sepulcher undisturbed. Alexius would not have made such a foolish, impossible promise to Bohemond or anyone else, without the promise being vague indeed, but we should not be surprised that the author of the *Gesta* includes it in his account. He is the same chronicler who refers to Alexius as the "evil emperor" on other occasions. What is clear is that any promises Bohemond made to Alexius, he could not wait to break. Whatever Alexius did pledge, Bohemond was ready to use against him.

Alexius must have breathed a sigh of relief when he discovered how willing Bohemond was to take the oath. At a feast to which Bohemond was invited, however, a slight hiccup almost broke up the happy reunion. The prince feared poison and Anna Comnena adds his undue suspicion to her growing list of reasons to hate the rascally Norman:

"For that dreadful Bohemund not only refrained from tasting the viands at all, or even touching them with the tips of his fingers, but pushed them all away at once, and, though he did not speak of his secret suspicion, he

divided them up amongst the attendants, pretending to all appearance to be doing them a kindness, but in reality, if you look at it aright, he was mixing a cup of death for them.”²⁹

The setback lasted only until the next morning. Bohemond was shown a treasure room the likes of which no westerner had ever laid eyes on. Alexius’s message was clear: loyalty to the oath and to his person would produce its advantages. Bohemond even turned the accepting of imperial gifts into a theatric performance. He first sent the treasures back in prideful (and probably mock) disdain, before greedily accepting them soon after.³⁰

Robert the Monk remembers Tancred being disgusted that Bohemond “gave in” to the emperor and took his vow. In loyal Tancred’s opinion, poor Bohemond was duped and needed to be avenged. Robert writes that: “After bemoaning Bohemond’s situation, Alexios’s schemes, and the yoke imposed on the leaders of Gaul,” Tancred wisely discerned to “comfort the former and punish the latter.”³¹

For his part, Bohemond launched a mini-crusade to convince his fellow magnates to swear an oath of fealty to the emperor.³² Bohemond even threatened Raymond with violence if he refused the emperor fealty. Anna reluctantly admits that Bohemond acted in perfect cohesion with imperial wishes. She also describes how the prince approached Alexius about the possibility of being named Domestic of the East, a Byzantine position that symbolized control over all the armies of the eastern Empire.³³ Alexius denied Bohemond this position, but there is no reason to believe that he did not secretly promise

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 112.

³¹ Robert the Monk, *Historia*, 33.

³² Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 87.

³³ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 111.

his old rival some leadership possibility. Most of the Latins, however, still thought Alexius himself would command the forces once the expedition reached Saracen lands.

It became clear that in the early stages of the First Crusade Bohemond was the centerpiece of the expedition. Around his presence orbited the papacy (which sponsored his moves,) the great western princes (who looked to his example in all dealings with Alexius,) and the Byzantines (who seemed prepared to sacrifice much to secure his favor.) At this point in the movement, Bohemond may have rightly supposed that he could emerge as sole leader and guide the pilgrim masses to Jerusalem itself.

4. The Road to Nicaea

With Constantinople behind them, the crusaders understood that the ancient city of Nicaea (today a town in Turkey, Southeast of Istanbul) would be the first major action they would see. This chapter will scrutinize Bohemond's foundational role at the Siege of Nicaea. As the Norman surfaced as the major Frankish political force at Constantinople, he left Nicaea as martial savior. Bohemond's soon-to-be vaulted cavalry charge also made its crusading debut.

The crusaders began to trickle out of Constantinople in late April 1097. Godfrey of Bouillon led the way towards Nicaea, followed by Tancred and Raymond of Toulouse. Peter the Hermit and some of the survivors of the People's Crusade (1096) rode with the great lords through the region in which Turks had recently massacred their followers. Bohemond remained with the emperor to discuss provisions.¹ As the crusaders arrived at Nicaea on May 6, the Franks began to take notice of their pitiful situation. The vanguard had moved on Nicaea without establishing any coherent plan of action or food supply. In fact, the gathered horde dangerously camped out in the open, before the city walls, for eight days waiting for something to happen. "They had come to Constantinople with half-formed ideas of aiding the eastern churches and marching on Jerusalem," writes Asbridge, "perhaps expecting the emperor himself to take personal command of the expedition." This was not to be. The emperor's plan was to throw his crusading hordes

¹ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95.

against the city and watch from afar. Alexius had already decided that the barbarous Franks were too unpredictable to lead himself.²

With Alexius opting to await the results of the siege of Nicaea from the safety of nearby Pelecanus, Bohemond made his first real contribution as a crusader: he arrived with food and supplies for the horde.³ The *Gesta*, of course, treats Bohemond like an armored savior:

“After the illustrious man, Bohemund, came, he ordered the greatest market to be brought by sea, and it came both ways at the same time, this by land, and that by sea, and there was the greatest abundance in the whole army of Christ.”⁴

Alexius had sent two advisors with the group, both of whom were more than proficient at siege tactics. Manuel Boutoumites (d. 1112), the first of Alexius’s agents, was immediately granted entry into Nicaea, where he laid out terms for a peaceful surrender. When this diplomacy fell through, Manuel immediately went to work helping the Franks construct siege towers with an eastern flair. It is possible that Bohemond had helped plan the siege instrumentation and tactics with the Byzantines before leaving Constantinople. Taticius (d. c. 1099), the second imperial agent, arrived at camp, leading 2,000 imperial troops and professing to be the emperor’s true representative on the expedition. Taticius and his leadership was welcomed by the crusaders, who probably felt it best to keep an

² Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 119.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ “*Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum.*” in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans., August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 101-103.

appropriate distance from this half-Arab, half-Greek eunuch, who wore a metal nose plate in place of his actual appendage that had been cut off in an earlier engagement.⁵

Nicaea was a large city and its towered walls ran for miles. Luckily, for the crusaders, the Seljuk Sultan, Kilij Arslan (d. 1107), and his large army was not within its walls upon their arrival, as he was away fighting the Danishmends, a Turkish dynasty and rival to the Seljuk Turks. Raymond of Aguiliers describes the city and notes its daunting defenses. As Raymond notes, Nicaea was “encircled by walls so high that neither the assaults of men nor the attacks of any machine are feared. Indeed, the ballistae of the neighboring towers are so turned with reference to one another that no one can approach without danger; however, if anyone wants to approach nearer, he is easily overwhelmed from the top of the towers without being able to retaliate.”⁶

The siege began with Bohemond and his southern Italian Normans making camp before the city’s northern gate, Godfrey, and Robert of Flanders near the eastern. It is outside the walls of Nicaea that Bohemond, allegedly, gave credence to the long-standing Turkish myth that the Franks were cannibals. The Norman would, reportedly, see to it that the Saracens and Turks within the city would witness his men turning the roasting bodies of their fallen comrades on spits. Terror, as an instrument of war, thus became a legacy of the Crusades thanks to Bohemond’s actions.⁷

The Turks inside the city frantically ushered envoys out in search of their leader, Sultan Kilij Arslan I (d. 1107), to beg him to return with haste. Arslan had left his family and treasury inside Nicaea to make war on the Danishmends, believing that this new

⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁶ Raymond of Aguiliers, *Historia francorum qui ceperint Jerusalem*, in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans., August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 103-105.

⁷ D.H. Lawrence, *Movements in European History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 125.

wave of crusaders would prove no more difficult to defeat than had Peter the Hermit's mob. On May 16, 1097, 2,000 of the desperate defenders trickled out of Nicaea's gates to face the Christians and were promptly slaughtered:

“There all our forces were assembled in one body, and who could have counted so great an army of Christ? No one, as I think, has ever before seen so many distinguished knights or ever will again!”⁸

Even the hyperbole of *The Gesta* cannot take away from the fact that the tens of thousands of Christendom's finest must have made for a stirring sight.

On May 21, the crusaders faced a much more dangerous threat, as the forces of Kiliç Arslan finally poured down out of the hills towards their positions. Losses were heavy on both sides. For the first time, the crusaders faced the archetypal Muslim army: mare riding, lightly armored archers wielding composite bows, set on harassing an enemy to the point of causing them to scatter their ranks. While two of the lords kept the enemy hemmed in, the battle hinged on Bohemond's execution of the pride of the Frankish strategy: the heavy cavalry charge – pitting stallion against mare and heavily armored knight against the light and nimble.⁹ The sultan fled the field on May 21, much to the consternation of the defenders inside the city. The crusaders then excitedly prepared their siege weapons for the final push against the walls of Nicaea.

The first projectiles launched over the walls of the former Byzantine city were the heads of the recently slain Muslims, a common medieval practice that satisfied one of the *Ss* of siege warfare: *scaring* the garrisons with propaganda. The other “S” phrases associated with a siege were “*suborning* or *subverting* key defenders, *sapping* the walls,

⁸ “Gesta francorum,” 101-103.

⁹ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 125.

starving the population, *storming* the defenses, and *shelling* the besieged.”¹⁰ As the siege wore on, the Franks would rely on each of these tactics.

No other crusading leader had more siege experience than Bohemond. He had only just been, after all, involved in a siege before he had dropped everything to take up the cross. The fact that Bohemond was equally proficient at leading a charge in the Middle Eastern deserts was impressive. Muslim warriors were difficult to charge. Unlike western European forces, who usually offered a solid target, Muslims would often open up their ranks at an opportune moment, and then close them around the over-pursuing Franks.¹¹

The first prominent siege weapon manufactured came from Godfrey’s camp and was known as a *vulpus*, or Fox. The device was a type of oaken bombardment screen, under which troops could advance on the walls under protection. The technological marvel broke apart before it could be fully tested, killing twenty of Godfrey’s infantrymen. Raymond’s camp produced a better apparatus. The *tortoise* was a sturdier built, sloped-roof screen-device that offered enough protection for miners to sap under the walls, set fire to the apparatus, and fell the wall. The Muslim reinforcements quickly stymied any successes the crusaders gained with the use of such implementations, however.¹²

Alexius, from the safety of his rear camp, employed two acts of subterfuge to finally win the day and cause the Turkish surrender. The first of these two tricks involved nearby Lake Ascanius, which had long been used by the entrenched Turks for

¹⁰ Bernard S. Bachrach, “Medieval Siege Warfare: A Reconnaissance,” *The Journal of Military History* 58, no.1 (1994): 119-143 at 125.

¹¹ Christopher J. Marshall, “The Use of the Charge in Battles in the Latin East, 1192 - 1291,” *Historical Research* 63 (1990): 221-226 at 221.

¹² Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 128.

food supply purposes. In July, the emperor had boats dragged across the desert, under command of Manuel Boutoumites, and deposited in the lake, ensuring that the Turks were cut off from a large portion of their provisions. The author of the *Gesta* described the Turks as being “marveled upon seeing them, not knowing whether they were manned by their own forces or the Emperor's.” However, after they recognized that the fleet was, indeed, of the Emperor, “they were frightened even to death, weeping, and lamenting; and the Franks were glad and gave glory to God.”¹³

Alexius’s second act of deception involved Boutoumites and Taticius. The former was sent to accept the surrender of the Nicene Turks, whose panic over the emperor’s ships in the lake had turned into desperation. The city was surrendered to Boutoumites on June 19, and the crusaders, who for months had looked forward to looting and pillaging the city, watched as Byzantine standards were raised over the city.

The crusaders became foreigners in a city they had helped to secure. Boutoumites was named Duke of the city and allowed Franks to enter only in sightseeing parties of ten or less. The crusaders were forbidden to leave the region without swearing the oath of allegiance to the emperor, if they had not done so already.

After seeing the spoils of Nicaea, Bohemond became even more impatient to break his oath to Alexius, but first he had one more act of pacification left to play. Tancred, who had slipped away from Constantinople without making the oath, refused again, at Nicaea, in the face of the emperor.¹⁴ Alexius looked to Bohemond for help.¹⁵ Anna Comnena recalls the role Bohemond played in wrangling Tancred into the fold,

¹³ “*Gesta francorum*,” 62-64.

¹⁴ John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 115.

¹⁵ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 99.

even after he charges one of the emperor's servants who had grown weary of Tancred's stubbornness. The Norman scolds his nephew:

“It is not fitting for you to behave in such an impudent way to the Emperor's kinsman.’ Then Tancred, ashamed of having acted like a drunken man towards [Alexius and his advisors]... and also influenced to a certain degree by Bohemund's and the others' counsel, took the oath.”¹⁶

It seems obvious that Bohemond's scolding was a piece of drama designed for the Norman to show the emperor just how “on board” he was with the oath and the homage due Alexius. After all, Bohemond was the first magnate to take the oath and he, out of character, insisted that other magnates do the same without hesitation.

The crusaders had reached Nicaea with no degree of central leadership or strategy. Which, if any, of the warrior-magnates would emerge as commander-in-chief of the expedition? What, if any, continuing role would Alexius and the Byzantines play in the venture? The answer to these questions was unexpected even to the crusader-leaders. First, no commander-in-chief would materialize and, more importantly, none would be needed. Secondly, Byzantine aid, the crusaders discovered, was over. Alexius and his expeditionary force returned home and left the Franks to themselves in the Turkish wilds; nonetheless they still expected them to turn over any captured lands and booty to the crown. No crusader scoffed more at this stipulation than Bohemond, who actually helped to lay out a plan for the retrieval and divvy of booty. Blaming Alexius for his “betrayal” of the Franks became a staple of his rhetoric, and later it would serve as his primary excuse for keeping Antioch for himself. Thomas Asbridge describes the

¹⁶ Anna Comnena , *The Alexiad*, trans. Elizabeth A. Dawes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992), 275-276.

post-Nicaea turning point that had been reached for the crusaders: “From Nicaea onward, the crusaders were forced to feel their way towards an organizational structure – a council of princes – in which the highest echelon of crusade leaders, men such as Raymond of Toulouse and Bohemond of Taranto, met to discuss and agree policy. Overall, this system was remarkably successful.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 123.

goal of all the crusaders save, now, Bohemond.³⁸ Raymond finally gave in and let go of his Antiochene dreams in November, but only after Pope Urban declined a written request to come and take control of the city.³⁹ Bohemond accompanied the crusaders towards Jerusalem for about 50 miles, as far as Latakia, and then he returned to his new principality.⁴⁰ Raymond reluctantly led the crusade away from Antioch, leaving his rival in control of the city.

³⁸ Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, 42.

³⁹ Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 162.

⁴⁰ R.C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1133*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 27.

5. Ambush at Dorylaeum

This chapter will inspect Bohemond's actions at the battle at Dorlaeum, an ambush the Franks were drawn into as a result of poor planning and yet were saved thanks to Bohemond's guidance and ferocity. In this battle, Bohemond demonstrated his ability not only to influence men to persevere over seemingly insurmountable odds, but also to pilot civilians and non-combatants. Even in a near disastrous encounter, Bohemond's legacy as the centrifugal focus of the First Crusade grew.

Having secured Nicaea in the last week of June 1097, the crusaders headed for Antioch where they harbored a deep distrust for the Byzantines. The Franks held a council to decide how to proceed, and it was decided that the army, roughly 70,000 strong, should be divided up into foraging contingents, separated as they had been on the way to Constantinople.¹ It is not known who should be blamed for such a poor military tactic, but, nonetheless, Bohemond led the vanguard.² Bohemond's company included Tancred, Robert Curthose, the Duke of Normandy, son of William the Conqueror (c. 1050-1134), Robert of Flanders (c. 1065-1111), and the Byzantine general Taticius.

Three days into the march, on June 30, Bohemond's army was ambushed, near Dorylaeum by an overwhelming mass of Turks while the Franks were setting up camp.³ Other Turkish princes, Danishmends, Persians, and Caucasian Albanian mercenaries had heavily fortified the Turks, who had regrouped under Kilij Arslan. Ralph of Caen insists

¹ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 134.

² *Ibid.*, 133.

³ Robert Levine, trans., *The Deeds of God Through the Franks* (Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2003-2009), <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext03/8dced10.txt/>.

that Bohemond saw “some 300,000 Turks coming towards them and shrieking heaven knows what barbarisms in loud voices.”⁴

Scores of Turks were riding their mares into the Frankish camp, shooting arrows, and retreating. Bohemond’s knights could only mount futile, disorganized counterattacks. His infantrymen and noncombatants were too panicky to form ranks at all. Bohemond calmly instructed his men to finish unrolling their tents. He then gathered the non-combatants at the center of camp, where springs flowed, and assigned them the task of bearing water to the fighting men. Bohemond dismounted his knights and placed them, together with the infantry forces, in a defensive formation around the helpless.⁵ Even the women travelling with the retinue contributed to the defensive action, which held the Saracens off for some time, until Bohemond finally decided to send for the likes of Raymond and Godfrey. While awaiting reinforcements, Bohemond’s contingent was pushed back to the banks of the Thymbris River, where the marshy ground protected the force from a cavalry charge, but did nothing to slow the slaughter from the Turkish arrows. Further, Bohemond’s hotheaded knights could not resist sporadic charges at the enemy, who would retreat before inflicting more damage by firing volleys of arrows.

Godfrey was the first to arrive in relief, with about fifty knights. Throughout the afternoon and into the evening, other small groups of crusaders arrived and fought their way through to Bohemond, or died trying. As the crusaders were pushed from the riverbank into the shallows, Raymond’s main force arrived, hit the Turkish flank, and scattered the enemy into disarray. As the other magnates rushed into the battle, Bohemond, Robert Curthose, and Tancred unleashed a cavalry charge, while the papal

⁴ Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, trans., *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 107.

⁵ Rodney Stark, *God’s Battalions: The Case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 146.

legate, Bishop Adhemar of Puy (d. 1098), led troops of his own through a mountain pass and emerged behind the Turks to harass them.⁶ Adhemar's Roland-like bravery proved to be the breaking point for the Turks. The battle of Dorylaeum was a fierce one, which left some 3,000 Muslims and 4,000 Christians dead.⁷ It was also a splendid example of the strength the Christians possessed when working together. Anselme of Ribemont, a member of the ambushed entourage, insists, in a letter to the Archbishop of Reims that the "number of the Turks was estimated at 260,000. All of our army attacked them, killed many, and routed the rest."⁸

Dorylaeum was a battle that was not supposed to happen and did only because of questionable decision-making on the part of the crusaders. Thanks mainly to the leadership of Bohemond and the fighting prowess of all the Franks, the ambush turned into one of the glorious Christian victories in all of the Crusades. Dorylaeum broke the will of Kilij Arslan, who attempted to avoid pitched battles against the crusaders thereafter.⁹ Once again, it had been the leadership and actions of Bohemond who had pulled the crusaders back from the brink of disaster, and who had reinforced himself as the centerpiece of the expedition.

⁶ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 137.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Anselme of Ribemont to Manasses II," in "Letters of the Crusaders Written from the Holy Land," in *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History* (revised edition), Dana Carlton Munro, tr. and ed., vol. 1, no. 4 (Philadelphia: Department of History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1900), 39-40.

⁹ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade and the Foundations of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 190.

6. The Road to Antioch

The struggle for Antioch was the most important of Bohemond's career and the one in which he most proved his worth as the true leader of the crusade. At Antioch, Bohemond accomplished four victories, almost singlehandedly, on which his martial fame can rest. He also made use of three politically ambitious acts, each of which this paper will discuss.¹ This chapter's study of Bohemond's feats at Antioch will illuminate the whole picture of the Norman, as his skills in battle, his ability to manipulate others, and his under-handed dealings shine forth.

The crusaders arrived at Antioch on October 20, 1097. Antioch is situated on the Orontes River, only twelve miles from the Mediterranean. The sprawling city boasted the most impressive of fortifications. Antioch stood partly on a mountainside; its massive walls climbed steep slopes, crossed a river, and included a citadel a thousand feet above the city center. About sixty towers punctuated the walls.² The crusaders understood that they were about to attack a city that had been the third largest in all the Roman Empire, after only Rome and Alexandria. Godfrey of Lorraine and Bohemond convinced Raymond of Toulouse that a siege was the only way to win the important city. The only real advantage the Franks could claim was that they had control of the nearby port of St. Simeon, from whence they could bring in the necessities of life and siege.³

¹ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 163.

² *Ibid.*, 64.

³ *Ibid.*, 159.

Bohemond's opening ambitious play occurred before the first battle plan had been hatched. He was the first to arrive at the city gates and set up camp, strategically, before the St. Paul's Gate on the northeast corner of the city.⁴ Governorship of the city was already in Bohemond's mind, and each subsequent decision made was as much for his own chances of winning the city as it was for the good of the expedition.

It soon became apparent that successful foraging expeditions would be necessary to keep the bodies and minds of the besiegers sharp. The psychological attacks from the Muslim side of the walls quickly worked to sap the spirit from the Franks. The Christian patriarch of Antioch (there was a Christian presence still in Antioch at the time. This Greek-Orthodox leader was John VII) was regularly dragged to the walls, in full view of the crusading camps, and beaten with iron rods. An executed archdeacon's head was catapulted into the Frankish midst.⁵ To disrupt the crusader foraging expeditions, a Muslim garrison often appeared out of nowhere to ambush the parties.

Bohemond was chosen to lead a scouting mission to discover the source of these attacks, but in typical fashion, he went ahead and eradicated the problem himself. He divided his knights into two groups to search the lands around Antioch, hoping that his vanguard could lure the Muslims into an attack. The advance party would then feign a retreat and lead the enemy into the hands of the rear guard. The feigned retreat had been a successful Norman tactic since Hastings in 1066, and the Franks made regular use of it in the First Crusade. The plan worked to perfection, and the guerilla foe was subdued.⁶

Bohemond's second victory at Antioch occurred as leader of one of the aforementioned foraging expeditions. On December 28, 1097, Bohemond and Robert of

⁴ Ibid., 162.

⁵ Ibid., 168.

⁶ Ibid., 167.

Flanders set out from Antioch, after attempting a meager celebration of the Feast of the Nativity, with an assortment of over 400 knights and infantrymen. On New Year's Eve of 1097, this army met a Muslim relief force that was headed by Duquq of Damascus (d. 1104). Both Bohemond and Robert were able to break through the Saracen lines and scatter their foe.⁷

The victory proved to be an empty one, for the vassals returned to their fellow crusaders with virtually no food and most of the infantry had been killed.⁸ To make matters worse, the Turks within the walls, discovering the two princes were away, had swarmed out of the city to try to overwhelm the remaining crusader force.⁹ Peter Tudebode reports that “after learning of the absence of Lord Bohemond and the Count of Flanders, [the Turks] swarmed out of the town and contemptuously moved to attack us. With their knowledge of the absence of some of our most experienced knights, they probed the weakest spots in our siege forces and discovered on Tuesday that they could strike and resist us. The accursed barbarians stealthily approached and, striking viciously the unwary and foolish Christians, killed many knights and footmen.”¹⁰

When Bohemond returned to camp, he discovered, much to his chagrin, that many of his men were already back in camp, having retreated from their unsuccessful scavenging attempt.¹¹ In a speech given to his men, Peter Tudebode has Bohemond use phrases such as “unfortunate and most miserable people” and “vilest and saddest of all

⁷ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 76.

¹⁰ Peter Tudebode, *Historia de Hierosolymitano itinere*, trans. John Hugh Hill and Laurita L. Hill (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1974), 136-146.

¹¹ John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 240.

Christians.”¹² As the Norman would discover soon enough, that type of crestfallen language was soon to be the norm in the crusader ranks.

Towards the end of January of 1098, famine and depression had nestled their way in to the crusader’s camps. Bohemond even hinted that it might be best if he leave Antioch and return home.¹³ Bohemond did not intend to leave his future fiefdom, of course; the insinuation was made for purely political reasons. Raymond was totally convinced that Bohemond’s words held no weight and was sure that “he [Bohemond] had said this for the reason that he was ambitiously longing to become head of the city of Antioch.”¹⁴

Two famous leaders from the People’s Crusade, Peter the Hermit (d. 1115), and William the Carpenter (d. 1102), were discovered missing, having stolen away in the middle of the night. Fiery Tancred pursued the deserters and brought them before Bohemond. Peter Tudebode depicts the scene. William lay all night, prostrate and pathetic, in Bohemond’s tent, too ashamed to face his fellow Franks.¹⁵ Tancred had treated the deserting pair roughly and dragged them before his uncle. Bohemond starts in with more rhetoric laced with terms venom, intending to shame the would-be deserters. He soon switches gears and promises the fleers that he would spare them any further punishment and pardon them. A political act if there had ever been any to this point in the campaign.¹⁶ The surprising way in which the prince dealt with the situation marks the

¹² Ibid., 240.

¹³ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The Crusades: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 38.

¹⁴ Raymond of Aguiliers, *Historia francorum qui ceperint Jerusalem*, in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans., August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 103-105.

¹⁵ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades Vol. 1: The First Crusades and the Foundations of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 223.

¹⁶ Peter Tudebode, *Historia*, 176.

second of Bohemond's ambitious ploys.¹⁷ First, the Norman treated the two escapees remarkably well. Bohemond must have felt that a degree of leniency would endear himself to some of the rank-and-file crusaders who were still "on the fence" as to whom to support in the ownership-of-Antioch campaign.¹⁸ Second, Bohemond even threatened to leave camp himself, citing the costly misery his men faced with every passing day. Raymond of Toulouse responded to Bohemond's empty threat with only cynicism.¹⁹ It seems clear that the Prince of Taranto was merely hoping the other princes would offer him the city of Antioch if he would stay. Bohemond had obviously decided that Antioch would be the location for him to build up his own principality that would rival all others in the Mediterranean world, including the Byzantine Empire, and had begun scheming to bring this idea to fruition. A mighty kingdom in northern Palestine would be the perfect base from which to launch his final invasion of the Empire.

In early February of 1098, news arrived in the crusader camps of an immense Muslim relief army, some 12,000 strong, led by Ridwan of Aleppo (d. 1113). Christians within the city would often escape and bring news to the besiegers, before joining the Frankish hordes.²⁰ In council, the princes decided that Bohemond, Robert of Flanders, and Stephen of Blois would ride to face the new threat with about 700 troops. Bohemond produced one of his finest pieces of generalship against Ridwan and won his third great Antiochene victory. First, he divided the Christians into six squadrons. The first five spread out in a fanning vanguard, while Bohemond, as customary, held back the rear

¹⁷ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 178.

¹⁸ Steven Runciman, *The First Crusade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 134.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 171.

guard.²¹ From this position, Bohemond unleashed a devastating cavalry charge and pushed the Muslims into a chaotic retreat.²²

English forces played no real military part in the First Crusade, save the sending of a few knights to various foreign companies, but their vessels saved the starving expedition in March of 1098. The English king, Edgar Atheling (1051–1126), who was living in exile in Constantinople, led a fleet stocked with supplies and materials for siege engines into the harbor at St. Simeon. Bohemond and Raymond rode to escort the English artisans back to camp, as these two had emerged as the forerunners to rule Antioch should the city fall and each distrusted the other to make any moves alone.²³ A Muslim garrison from Antioch attacked the two princes on the road back to camp. Almost the entire Frankish infantry was decimated early in the engagement, for only the knights in the rear survived. From his typical position in the rear guard, Bohemond won his fourth victory with help from Godfrey, who had ridden hard from the crusader camp in relief. Over 1,500 Muslims, including 15 emirs, fell in the charge, and the river was said to have run with Saracen blood. Though the victory was a minor one in the grand scheme of engagements, it was the most celebrated thus far in the long siege of Antioch.

For the first time, the crusaders had defeated a garrison from within the city itself, and crusader morale was lifted.²⁴ The magnates decided to build a structure to seal off the Bridge Gate to Antioch, thus, for the first time, cutting off the main supply line of the Muslim forces inside. Raymond immediately raised his own standard above the new tower, in a move that signified his own claim to future ownership of the city. The rivalry

²¹ Runciman, *A History vol. 1*, 221.

²² France, *Victory*, 238.

²³ *Ibid.*, 218.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

between the Counts of Toulouse and Taranto seems to have grown almost to a breaking point.

By late April or early May, Bohemond had secretly established a line of communication with a guard serving on the gate of St. George. The Antiochene was named Firuz and only emerges as a shadowy figure. It is probable that he was an Armenian Christian, though this is not certain.²⁵ Somehow, the Norman convinced Firuz to betray the city and, on a prearranged signal, let a ladder down for the Franks to enter the city and open its gates to the main host. Bohemond shrewdly opted to keep this intelligence hidden, even from the other princes, until he found a way to convince them to allow him to control Antioch after it fell. Peter Tudebode wrote of the initial rejection that Bohemond faced when he first unveiled his scheme:

“All the leaders rejected and blocked the scheme and said: ‘No one shall be given the city and all shall possess it equally. Since we have toiled equally, we shall share equally its possessions.’ Following this reaction, a scowling Bohemond immediately turned heel on the dissenters.”²⁶

Despite the initial rejection, Bohemond demonstrated his political acumen by convincing the barons to allow him to enter the city.

\ On May 29, the princes, except for Raymond, finally capitulated and gave Bohemond what he wanted. The son of Guiscard even found a way to rid the crusade of the lone remaining imperial agent, Taticius. Bohemond may have told Alexius’s legate that the other princes were plotting to kill him and that it would be much safer for him to return to Constantinople. When Taticius slipped away, Bohemond used his leaving as an

²⁵ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade*, 55.

²⁶ Tudebode, *Historia*, 1974.

excuse to convince the other lords of the necessity to break any obligations to return Antioch to the Byzantines should it fall.

Firuz was more than happy to oblige the knight he had come to respect over the weeks Bohemond had been communicating with him. It also seems that it was Firuz who came up with the feigned-assault decoy:

“Have the heralds blow their trumpets and assemble the Frankish people so that they may rush forth and pretend to ravage Saracen lands, and afterwards return rapidly by the mountain on the left. I shall be on the lookout ready for these troops, whom I shall conduct safely into the towers which I guard.”²⁷

Firuz’s will was shaken upon seeing the initial crusaders who looked to first mount the ladder:

“Firuz was soon frightened when he saw such a small band of Christians and, apprehensive that he and our soldiers be captured by the Turks, exclaimed, ‘*Micho francos echome*’; which means ‘We have few Franks.’ He further inquired, ‘Where is Bohemond? Where is that invincible knight?’”²⁸

Bohemond appeared and so did a larger contingent of crusaders. Firuz’s anxiety was satiated for the moment as the first Franks mounted the ladder. The panicked climbers overturned the ladders in their rush, and several plummeted to injury and death.

On the second attempt, the knights managed to dispose of every guard stationed around the nearest three towers and to open the gates. The waiting crusaders poured into

²⁷ Runciman, *A History vol. 1*, 234.

²⁸ Ibid.

the city to shouts of “God’s will!” “God’s will!” It was, apparently, God’s will that a massacre take place, for the Franks showed no mercy to the scrambling Antiochenes:

“All of the streets of Antioch were choked with corpses so that the stench of rotting bodies was unendurable, and no one could walk the streets without tripping over a cadaver.”²⁹

The only objective that the crusaders failed to accomplish was to take the citadel to the east of the city, in which the surviving Muslims were holed up. Bohemond immediately had his blood-red banner raised from the inner walls, striking yet another of his claims to Antioch.³⁰

By June 5, the Muslim general Kerbogha arrived at the head of a Fatimid embassy from Egypt, the largest relief force to date, and quickly besieged the former besiegers.³¹ Depression soon once again filled the hearts of the Franks, as fear gave way to starvation. Comfort came, however, in a mysterious manner: through portends. Many crusaders reported witnessing a meteor fall from the heavens into the Turkish camp. This, the crusaders reckoned, was a hugely meaningful happening. Raymond of Aguiliers reported:

“At this time, very many things were revealed to us through our brethren; and we beheld a marvelous sign in the sky, for during the night there stood over the city a very large star, which, after a short time, divided into three parts and fell in the camp of the Turks.”³²

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 208-209.

³¹ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade*, 58.

³² Raymond of Aguiliers, *Historia*, 176-82.

Riding out the dark days of the siege, the crusaders also received help from a mystic named Peter Bartholomew (d. 1099), who told crusader leaders that he had been experiencing visions for six months, mainly visits from St. Andrew. Peter said the holy man had shown him the location of the Holy Lance, inside the Church of St. Peter in Antioch, and instructed him to inform the princes and to give the Lance to Raymond of St. Gilles when he found it. The undutiful Peter was visited, and pressured, four more times until finally speaking of his visions in June of 1098. The *Gesta* reports that the Franks “received it with great gladness and fear, and a joy beyond measure arose in the whole city.”³³

Of course, not everyone “received” the Lance with gladness; many were skeptical, including Bohemond. The Norman was, in turn, the biggest doubter of the Lance and the first to make use of it for his own ends.³⁴ Adhemar of Le Puy, the papal legate, openly accused the mystic of being a charlatan and became vocal in his criticism of Peter; with good reason: he had seen the true Lance in Constantinople. Relics like the Lance had become as popular and as important in the West as they had been in the East. People who had previously traveled hundreds of miles to see a relic (as many men and women in the medieval west would do) now, because of the crusading movements, had chanced to see them closer to home.³⁵ As for Bartholomew and his Lance, he was fortunate that an epidemic of typhoid spread through the Latin camp and claimed Adhemar’s life. Bartholomew used the tragedy to report a posthumous sighting of Adhemar. He told the crusader leaders that he had seen the former papal legate who had,

³³ “*Gesta francorum et aliorum Hierosolymitanorum*,” in *The First Crusade: The Accounts of Eyewitnesses and Participants*, trans. August C. Krey (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1921), 174-176.

³⁴ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade*, 96.

³⁵ Runciman, *A History*, Vol. 1, 41.

with the help of St. Andrew, only just escaped the fires of hell (into which he had been thrown in for doubting the veracity of the Lance) and now assured Peter that he was a believer. By April 8, 1099, the matter of the authenticity of the Lance was still not over for Peter. He voluntarily underwent an ordeal by fire to prove himself and the scene cost him his life. He died on April 20, claiming until the end that the flames had not injured him, just the stampeding crowds who had come out to see him.³⁶

Of course, the Lance was found exactly where Peter said it would be (as the mystic had doubtlessly planted the relic), and Bohemond was the first leader to make use of it. His parading the lance in front of his troops caused them to become, even as the dark days of the siege continued, “courageous and resolute to fight.”³⁷

On June 28, the crusaders desperately streamed out of the city gates to meet Kerbogha’s overwhelming horde with the Holy Lance raised before them. Kerbogha hesitated to take advantage of his numerical advantage over the Franks and let seven divisions of Christians merge into a compact force. The only bold move the Muslim leader made was to send a party to attack the Franks’ unprotected left, but Bohemond, forming the seventh division, beat them back. The battle was over quickly, and the outnumbered Christians won the day and the city. The citadel surrendered only to Bohemond, while ignoring Raymond - a move that many Christian princes believed to be somehow prearranged by Bohemond.

Half a year of indecision and internal squabbling followed, with Raymond leading the dwindling movement that refused to turn Antioch over to Bohemond. The rank-and-file crusaders threatened mutiny, so eager were they to continue on to Jerusalem, the real

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ E.A. Freeman, *A History of the Norman Conquest of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1875), 374.

7. Prince of Antioch

This chapter will scrutinize Bohemond's years as Lord of Antioch (1098-1108), the most tumultuous in the Norman's life. The time was split between attempting to reinforce relations with friendly neighbors, shoring-up defenses and, eventually, planning a crusade of his own – one to recruit a force from Western Europe with which to attack Alexius and the Byzantine Empire for a final time. These events were broken up by incarceration: Bohemond was captured by a Turkish leader and spent three years in prison. The turbulent decade could have seen the culmination of Bohemond's lifelong goals. Instead, the period ends in defeat and humiliation.

Prince Bohemond's first foreign-policy decision was two-fold. He knew the naval aid that Alexius had been rendering was about to dry up, especially after what had happened regarding Antioch. The Italian maritime states had long been loyal to him, however, and this time Bohemond turned to the Genoese.¹ Fourteen friendly charters were drawn up between the two principalities. Interestingly, in all of these documents, Bohemond never once referred to himself as the ruler of Antioch, but simply “son of Robert Guiscard.” It was clear that the Norman was feeling out his newfound title.² Bohemond also looked to solidify his relationship with Cilician Armenia to the north. Tancred had established a foothold for the Latins in the region in 1097, and Bohemond worked to create a buffer zone between himself and the Byzantines. Cilicia offered

¹ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades Vol. 1: The First Crusades and the Foundations of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 251.

² Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of the Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 252-253.

fertile soil to feed his troops, developed fishing operations, and a productive textile industry.

1099 was an eventful year for Bohemond. First, Alexius fought to reoccupy Cicilia, Latakia, and took Maras, but the reoccupation was not to last. In August, Bohemond successfully laid siege to Latakia with the help of a Pisan fleet, which also delivered the new pro-Bohemond archbishop, Daimbert of Pisa (d. 1105).³ In the same year, Bohemond fulfilled his pilgrim vows and, with Baldwin of Edessa, made the journey to Jerusalem.⁴ Upon his return to his new principality of Antioch, the new prince expelled the Greek patriarch from the city and installed Daimbert.

Bohemond's greatest trouble occurred late in the year. The Christian Cilician Armenians had received intelligence that the Damishmendid emir was planning an attack on the city of Melitene, and its ruler, Gabriel of Melitene (d. 1102), begged help from Bohemond.⁵ Meletine was a Christian city that had won its independence from the Byzantine Empire in 1086 with the help of the Turks. Now, as Gabriel's plea attests, the Danishmendids were harassing the Christians. Unable to resist a chance to extend Antiochene influence, Bohemond rode north with about 300 knights, haphazardly, without sending an advance scouting party. The prince was attacked and encircled by Danishmend Turks, who were led by Malik Ghazi Gumushtekin (d. 1104). The emir had previously come up short against Bohemond in battle, at Dorylaeum. This time, Bohemond and his cousin Richard of Salerno (d. 1114) were captured, after the forces from Antioch were devastated and led away to languish for three years in prison. The

³ Runciman, *A History*, Vol. 1, 304.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁵ *Ibid.*

engagement is known as the Battle of Melitene.⁶ While in prison, it is rumored that Bohemond divided his time between romancing a Muslim princess named Melaz and praying to St. Leonard, the patron saint of the interred.⁷

Emperor Alexius jumped at the chance to ransom Bohemond, determined to have him rot in a Byzantine, instead of a Turkish, prison.⁸ He offered Malik Ghazi Gumushtekin (d. 1104) 260,000 dinars to turn the Norman over to him. Kilij Arslan, the true overlord of the negotiating emir heard of this arrangement and stipulated that he should get half of this ransom money, and if he did not, he promised to attack. Even prison chains could not quell Bohemond's shrewdness. He personally guaranteed Ghazi Gumushtekin that he could pay him, alone, half the money that Alexius had offered, as well as Antiochene friendship if he were released. The emir agreed. Baldwin of Edessa ransomed Bohemond, who returned to Antioch in triumph in August of 1103.

Tancred, who had governed Antioch while his uncle was incarcerated, had conquered some territory to the north but not enough to loosen the tightening pincers threatening the principality on three sides: the Seljuk Turks from the east, the Byzantines from the west, and Raymond of Toulouse, who now governed the former emirate of Tripoli, from the south. Raymond and his men had besieged Tripoli, in 1102, after the battle for Jerusalem, which was a problem for Bohemond, as this would set his bitter rival on his very doorstep. Buoyed by Bohemond's return, however, Antiochene knights

⁶ Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, trans., *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 156.

⁷ Steven Runciman, *A History of the Crusades: The Kingdom of Jerusalem and the Frankish East, 1100-1187, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 42-44.

⁸ Jean Richard, *The Crusades, c.1071-c.1291* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 72.

fought alongside Baldwin of Edessa throughout 1104 to subdue the area between Antioch and Edessa and to harass Ridwan of Aleppo.⁹

While campaigning together near the Euphrates, Bohemond and Baldwin rode upon a large force of Seljuk Turks from Mosul and Mardin. On May 7, 1104, the Battle of Harran commenced. Bohemond and Tancred commanded the right flank, Baldwin and Joscelin of Courtenay the left. The battle quickly turned in favor of the Turks when Baldwin's forces over-pursued the enemy on a cavalry charge and were beaten back, leaving the entire Latin force in disarray.

After some deliberation with Tancred, Bohemond decided that it was time to leave the Levant. His plan, initially, seems to have been to raise an army and return to Outremer to reinforce his kingdom, which was hemmed in on every side. He also hinted that, along the way, he would like to visit the tomb of St. Leonard in Noblat.¹⁰ It is not hard, however, to surmise Bohemond's actual purpose: he planned to recruit a large force with which to, engage Byzantium and topple Alexius. In any case, Bohemond veritably stripped Antioch of many of its best warriors and many provisions and left Tancred to scramble, once again, to keep the city intact.¹¹ Historians have referred to the Norman's trip west as Bohemond's Crusade.

Bohemond used trickery, in 1104, when he may have sailed beyond imperial waters without detection, by feigning his own death and riding in a punctured coffin alongside a rotting carcass.¹² This alleged stunt left an impression upon the emperor's

⁹ Runciman, *A History*, Vol. 2, 45.

¹⁰ Jonathan Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 125.

¹¹ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 137.

¹² *Ibid.*, 143.

daughter, Anna.¹³ She even goes so far as to suggest that a dead cock had been slaughtered and put in the coffin with the Norman in order to produce the right smell:

“And this smell seemed to those who are deceived by outward appearance to be that of Bohemund's body; and that villain Bohemund enjoyed this fictitious evil all the more; I for myself am astonished that he being alive could bear such a siege of his nostrils, and be carried about with a dead body.”¹⁴

Upon landing in Corfu, an inspired Bohemond sent a message to Alexius, via a certain “Duke of the town,” in which he brags that he has, “in the guise of a dead man,” “eluded every eye and hand, and mind.” The letter then goes on to divulge the reason why Bohemond has pulled off such a stunt:

“For to shatter the Roman Empire under thy sway, I died when alive, and came to life when dead. For as soon as I reach the continent opposite and see the men of Lombardy, and all the Latins and Germans and the Franks, our subjects and most warlike men, I shall fill thy towns and countries with many murders and much bloodshed until I plant my spear on Byzantium itself.” To such a pitch of arrogance was the barbarian carried.”¹⁵

The guesswork is over, if Anna is to be trusted. The message is important because in it, for the first time, we read Bohemond’s own words detailing his plan to violently “plant his flag” on Byzantine soil.

¹³ Ibid., 142-143.

¹⁴ Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans., Elizabeth A. Dawes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992), 298.

¹⁵ Ibid., 299.

Historians disagree as to how much aid Bohemond directly requested from the new pope, Paschal II (d. 1118), in his “crusade” across Europe in 1104. Pope Urban II had died in July of 1099, fourteen days after the crusaders took Jerusalem, but before news of the event had reached Italy. Pope Urban’s replacement was, undoubtedly, very wary about the proposition of damaging the tenuous relationship with the East any further and, to say the least, of sponsoring a crusading movement aimed at killing eastern Christians. It is doubtful that Bohemond could have enjoyed the same close relationship with Paschal II as he did with Pope Urban, but the prince was heard, nonetheless, by the new pope. Brett Edward Whalen reminds us that Pope Paschal II did see fit to send a papal legate, Bruno of Segni (c. 1047 – 1123), with Bohemond, legitimizing the campaign while doubtlessly understanding the Norman’s designs to invade the East.¹⁶ Anna reports that the pope was swayed, to a certain degree, by Bohemond’s arguments, by simply explaining that the “Pope was constrained by Bohemund’s arguments, and agreed with him, and sanctioned his crossing into Illyria.”¹⁷

Whether or not the daughter of Alexius was in a position to give voice to the thoughts of the papacy is another question. In any event, Bohemond arrived in Italy, in 1105, to a hero’s welcome. After visiting Noblat and leaving a gift of silver shackles at St. Leonard’s tomb, he thrilled audiences around France with his tales of battling the Saracens at now legendary battles and by the giving of gifts of relics from holy places.¹⁸ Bohemond even spread some literature around the west, which detailed his personal heroism and further deprecated Alexius and the Byzantines. King Henry I (1068-1135)

¹⁶ Brett Edward Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christians and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2009), 68.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁸ Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade*, 137.

of England prevented Bohemond from even landing on his shores, as he understood how great a pull the Norman would have over his nobles. French families named their sons after their crusading hero, and knights left their vassals to join his growing army. The King of France, Phillip I (1052-1108), gave Bohemond the hand of his daughter, Constance (1078-c. 1126), in marriage. Fittingly, his near equal, nephew Tancred, was married to one of the king's illegitimate daughters.¹⁹

By 1106, Bohemond was back in Southern Italy, constructing a fleet of over 200 ships and recruiting thousands of troops to his side. He had his sights set on Dyrrhachium and that city trembled with fear at the very mention of his name. Anna leaves us some fantastical scenes from within Constantinople itself upon hearing the news that Bohemond was on the move. In Anna's report, the emperor runs around shouting "in a piercing voice that Bohemond had crossed." At the mention of his name, the citizens "stood stark-frozen" in place while they "lost their wits."²⁰ At least Anna ends the scene with her father having gained back some degree of manliness. Her father, she reports, "full of courage and resource as ever, loosed the strap of his shoe and said 'For the present let us go to lunch, afterwards we will discuss the matter of Bohemund.'²¹

With his new army of 34,000, Bohemond attacked Alexius at Dyrrhachium in October of 1107. The Byzantines, aided by the Venetians, produced a winning strategy. Alexius carefully avoided pitched battle with Bohemond, and worked to cut off his supply lines, before settling in to await Bohemond's move. Alexius's blockade worked to perfection. Bohemond's forces were reduced to living off the land and scavenging

¹⁹ Richard, *The Crusades*, 128.

²⁰ Comnena, *Alexiad*, 299.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 299.

within range of deadly Byzantine ambushes.²² Bohemond's mercenary army came no closer to a successful push into Byzantine territory than had the troops of his father. A plague destroyed a large part of Bohemond's crusaders involved in the siege and the Venetian navy, working with Alexius, blocked off escape by the sea. This was to be the Norman's final battle and the source of his greatest shame.²³ Brought before his old enemy, Bohemond was forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Devol (1108.) The document made the prince a vassal of Alexius, forced him to turn over all conquered territories to the Empire, and to admit a Greek patriarch into Antioch.²⁴

Anna Comnena, on one hand, relishes describing the pitiful sight of the once-mighty Norman humbled before her father, and, on the other, in describing her first look at the barbarian with whom she had always been fascinated. She does not seem to be disappointed in his "gifts of nature." In fact, the emperor's daughter gets so sidetracked in describing the physical traits of Bohemond that she forgets to gloat over his defeat. She mentions the Norman's "deep chest and powerful arms," and notes that he was "perfectly proportioned,"²⁵ among other things.

Emperor and would-be usurper wasted little time and quickly, if awkwardly, got to business:

"We must leave the past now. If you really wish to make peace with me, you must first become one of my subjects, and then order your nephew

²² Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 182.

²³ Runciman, *The First Crusade*, 191.

²⁴ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 145.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 145.

Tancred to do the same, and to deliver up Antioch to the men I shall send according to the former agreement made between us.”²⁶

Bohemond initially scoffed at the idea with a spirit of false-bravado, until he had had reconsidered by the following day and willingly accepted the terms of the treaty. He returned to southern Italy a shell of his former self and never revisited Outremer:

“When Bohemund reached his own camp and had handed over his army to the men sent with him by the Emperor for this purpose, he embarked on a ship with one bank of oars and landed in Lombardy. He lived only six months longer and then paid the debt that all must pay.”²⁷

He died in relative obscurity at Canosa, in Apulia, in 1111.

²⁶ Ibid., 145.

²⁷ Ibid., 145.

8. Bohemond and the Emperor

A large part of Emperor Alexius' life was spent thinking about Bohemond of Taranto, as this chapter will detail. The relationship between the two men saw four stages come and go. First, the period of Bohemond's youth pitted prince against emperor in Eastern Europe (1080-1085). The second era was marked by the two rivals' cooperation, in the early days of the First Crusade, up to the point of Nicaea (1097). The third phase was one of betrayal on at least one side (1097-1108). Bohemond would use Alexius's perceived abandonment of the Franks as his main excuse to break his imperial oath and claim Antioch for himself. The final phase led to a final conflict and climax, in which Bohemond's greatest adversary would see to his downfall, manifested in the Treaty of Devol, but only after his years reigning as the "principal menace facing the empire."¹

First, it is significant to remember that of the powerful magnates making their way to Constantinople after Pope Urban II preached the First Crusade, no name was as notorious and as feared as that of Bohemond. The battles Alexius fought against Guiscard and his son were among the first engagements the new emperor had to pursue and were the clashes that most nearly cost him the Byzantine capital itself. Immediately after taking the throne in Constantinople, Alexius raised a large mercenary army (and the spirits of the Byzantine people) to try to deal with the many external threats plaguing the empire from the East. It was these new forces that the Normans defeated on several

¹ Paul Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier: A Political Study of the Northern Balkans, 900-1204* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199.

occasions, including the two that were commanded by Bohemond himself. The Byzantines did not throw around the phrase “Terror of the Greeks” lightly.²

Secondly, during the entire phase in which Alexius gathered the major leaders of the Franks to his doorstep, the thoughts and deeds of the emperor almost orbited around Bohemond. The “welcoming” emissaries that Alexius sent out to keep track of the Norman on his march across the Balkans kept the emperor in a disturbed state. Upon meeting with Bohemond on his trek, one envoy insisted that although Alexius had already experienced the power of the Norman, “his strength today surpasses that of former times no less than the strength of an eagle surpasses that of a sparrow.”³ Indeed, by the movements of Bohemond of Taranto, the legates reported that “all of Gaul has been roused.”⁴ This was the man from whom Alexius was preparing to demand an oath.

Finally, there came the matter of the emperor’s perceived “betrayal” of the Franks. After the Franks fought to defeat the Turkish defenders of Nicaea and enter the city, the crusaders felt deceived by the emperor, who had his own banner raised over the city and would only allow the Franks enter in small sightseeing parties. Bohemond, doubtlessly, used this “slight” to justify the plan (to take a principality of his own and break his oath) that he was already forming. Bohemond also manipulated the emperor’s seeming refusal to aid the crusaders holed up in Antioch as validation for his seizure of Antioch, although the Norman was surely aware that Alexius was, in point of fact, en route to reinforce the Franks.

² Thomas F. Madden, *The New Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 5-6.

³ Bernard S. Bachrach and David S. Bachrach, trans., *The Gesta Tancredi of Ralph of Caen* (New York: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 29.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

In actuality, as A.C. Krey insists, “it would be difficult to maintain the thesis that Alexius had failed to live up to his obligations [regarding his post-Nicaea absence].”⁵ Bohemond was under no pretenses that the emperor had actually, knowingly, betrayed the Franks. He assuredly knew that the emperor had been, in fact, “leading an army to aid in the capture of Antioch in 1098 and was well across Asia Minor when he was dissuaded from his purpose by the panic-stricken Stephen of Blois (c. 1045-1102), who assured him that the crusading army had already been destroyed.”⁶ Bohemond understood well enough that only the fleeing messengers from the engagement at Antioch had derailed Alexius’s reinforcement train to Antioch. He had also been made aware that Alexius had planned another rescue mission to leave soon.⁷

Bohemond’s trip to Jerusalem to fulfill his crusader’s vow was also wrought with schemes that further hurt not only his relationship with the Byzantine Empire, but also the Empire’s emerging reconciliation efforts with Rome. Pope Urban had already overseen the Council of Bari, a meeting designed to discuss eventual unification between the eastern and western churches and had made clear his goals to bring about a reunion. Bohemond was joined on his pilgrimage by Daimbert of Pisa (d. 1105). Daimbert’s history with the First Crusade was legendary. He had accompanied Urban II throughout France in 1095 to drum up initial support for the crusade and had raised a fleet of his own to sail for the Holy Land in 1098. Daimbert sailed for the Levant with a Pisan fleet, once even using the naval force to help Bohemond blockade the Byzantine port of Latakia from the sea. Daimbert eventually had the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Arnulf of

⁵ A.C. Krey, “Urban’s Crusade: Success or Failure?,” *The American Historical Review* 53, no.2 (1948): 235-250 at 239.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 239.

Chocques, deposed, asserting that he had been elected illegally, and took over that office in 1099. As would prove unfortunate for Daimbert, he was not on good terms with Baldwin, Lord of Edessa and future King of Jerusalem. Bohemond not only campaigned for Daimbert's promotion, but he also secured, for himself, the investment of the Principality of Antioch and, for Godfrey of Bouillon, the territory of Jerusalem. It appears obvious that Bohemond, through his association with Daimbert, had "hoped thereby to commit the Latin Church to the full support of his claim to Antioch, which neither the crusading leaders nor Alexius had recognized."⁸

The plans of Bohemond and Daimbert were interrupted only briefly upon Bohemond's capture and detainment. By November of 1100, Baldwin I (d. 1118), brother of the now-deceased Godfrey had taken control of Jerusalem and Daimbert of Pisa was quickly deposed (on suspicion that he had acquired the position illegally) and sent packing to Antioch, where he remained, with Tancred, until Bohemond's release. Daimbert followed Bohemond on his expedition west to garner support for an attack on Alexius. After securing an audience with Pope Paschal II, Daimbert was reinstated as Patriarch of Jerusalem, though he died on the way back to regain his patriarchate. Krey suggests that the papal acknowledgement of Bohemond's efforts against Alexius were not as damaging to East-West relations as may appear, for the conflict between the Norman and the emperor "had (already) altered any prospect of a union between the Greek and Latin churches until the question of Antioch was settled."⁹ In other words, though Alexius would certainly view Bohemond's papal-led "crusade" against him as, perhaps, irreconcilable, the damage had already been done. Alexius could never make

⁸ Ibid., 285.

⁹ Ibid., 285.

peace with Bohemond's seizure of Antioch. Here we see the idea made manifest, by one historian at least, that it had been Bohemond who singlehandedly who had delayed any reconciliation of the Church.

Alexius was stuck in the difficult position of not only having to deal with the coming, apparently papal-endorsed, invasion of his lands by Bohemond, but also of enlisting Muslim mercenaries to shoulder a large part of his defense against this threat. Krey explains that: "For Bohemond's enemies, then, including the Turks who lived near Antioch, were now Alexius' friends. Thus Alexius was asked to help the crusaders (many of whom would doubtless turn against him when they discovered that he was at war with the Latins of Antioch) against the Turks who were his allies in that war."¹⁰ This recruitment was an embarrassing situation for Alexius and he knew it would hurt his reputation with many crusaders. The Muslim conscripts, however, were the forces that, in the end, proved too strong for Bohemond's limited forces.¹¹ The shift that moved the Byzantines and Franks from allies to enemies, then, appears to rest squarely upon the shoulders of Bohemond. Even the Treaty of Devol, which forced Bohemond to reinstate a single Greek patriarch in Antioch as the sole ecclesiastical leader of the city, could do little to smooth out the issues (Bohemond's taking of Antioch and subsequent attack on the Empire) between Rome and Constantinople. Thanks in large part to the steady leadership of Tancred, who solidified the Frankish hold on Antioch (1108-1112), it would not be until Manuel (who took the principality after forcing regent Baldwin III of Jerusalem to make peace), the grandson of Alexius, ascended the imperial throne (1118-1180), that Antioch would again become a fief (a Latin state, still, but a vassal-state of

¹⁰ Ibid., 285.

¹¹ Ibid., 246.

the Empire) that Alexius had intended it to be. Only then, Krey explains, could “the discussions of the union of Greek and Latin churches were again resumed with some prospect of success.”¹²

Another Bohemond-related issue that may have complicated matters for Emperor Alexius is the fact that Alexius might, in fact, have offered Bohemond a large tract of land, perhaps even Antioch itself, in order to ensure the Norman would cooperate throughout the time in which the magnates gathered in Constantinople. Ralph of Caen, in his *Gesta Tancredi*, explains that Bohemond was “given [by Alexius] a portion of the Roman Empire as a gift which was so large that a horse would require 15 days to cross its length and eight to cross its breadth.”¹³ Similarly, the author of the *Gesta Francorum* makes note of the same “gift” and even gives it a name: “Antiochia.”¹⁴ Both sources can be considered suspect; Ralph of Caen was a Norman, after all, and the author of the *Gesta* was a veritable biographer of Bohemond and his trek. Peter Charanis, however, holds that the account of the *Gesta Francorum* is legitimate and should stand as such. “The passage of the *Gesta* is perfectly understandable,” Charanis writes, “and should be retained as authentic. Bohemond, placed in command of a region in the midst of the Moslem world, would not only serve as a buffer for the empire but would be permanently removed from Italy.”¹⁵ Could the emperor really have endorsed the idea, before the Franks even crossed the Bosphorus, that Bohemond control Antioch in the name of the empire? If so, how this would change history’s perspectives on the relationship between the two leaders. “Such indeed seems to have been the thought of Alexius,” Charanis

¹² *Ibid.*, 247.

¹³ Bachrach and Bachrach, *Gesta Tancredi*, 32.

¹⁴ Peter Charanis, “Aims of the Medieval Crusades and How They Were Viewed by Byzantium,” *Church History* 21, no. 2 (1952): 122-134 at 128-129.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 122-134.

continues, “but in this he failed completely, for Bohemond chose to keep Antioch. This, as is well known, not only brought about the final break between Alexius and the crusaders, but was to prove a continuous source of trouble between Greeks and Latins.”¹⁶ Whether or not this incredible thesis be accepted or not, it remains clear that Bohemond (who cried “betrayal” again and again, speaking of Alexius) betrayed his own oath to govern Antioch in the name of the empire or to turn the city over to the Greeks.

Interestingly, as fixated upon Bohemond as Alexius was throughout his career, in examining the way in which Bohemond governed his own principalities, it becomes clear that the Norman remained equally gripped with the Byzantine world. Ann Wharton Epstein studied the various “manifestations of Bohemond's desire to associate himself with the Byzantine imperium.”¹⁷ Epstein goes on to describe several of Bohemond’s “adopted features of the apparatus of the Byzantine state in his government of Apulia.”¹⁸ The Norman adopted the Byzantine title of *catepan* (the Byzantine term for an administrator) for his chief officials. Bohemond’s judges were given the Greek title *critis*. Even the Norman’s official seal took on Byzantine properties: the obverse shows a very Greek St. Peter, cross in hand.¹⁹

Even Bohemond’s choice for a final resting place took on Byzantine characteristics. He demanded to be buried, in Canosa, in a chapel attached to an apostle’s church. The Church of the Holy Apostles, in Constantinople, served, as Bohemond would be well aware, not only as a shrine dedicated to the Christ’s disciples, but as a

¹⁶ Ibid., 122-134.

¹⁷ Ann Wharton Epstein, “The Date and Significance of the Cathedral of Canosa in Apulia, South Italy,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 37 (1983): 79-90 at 87.

¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹ Ibid., 87.

mausoleum immortalizing fallen emperors.²⁰ In fact, as Epstein explains, the “intimate space of the interior of Bohemond's tomb resembles that of an atrophied cross-in-square church,” common “in Byzantine building tradition from the beginning of the tenth century.”²¹

Two major inscriptions that adorn Bohemond's chapel, “identify the deceased as a triumphant warrior and benevolent ruler on the model of the Byzantine emperor, traditionally represented in imperial encomia.”²² The first inscription reads:

“The magnanimous prince of Syria lies under this roof.
No one better than he will be born afterward in the universe.
Greece conquered four times, the greater part of the world
Sensed for a long time the genius and strength of Bohemond.
He conquered columns of thousands with a battle- line of tens by the rein
of his virtue, which indeed the city of Antioch knows.”

And the second:

“How noble, how valuable Bohemond was,
Greece has witnessed, Syria enumerates.
He conquered the former; protected the latter from
the enemy:
Hence the Greeks laugh, Syria, at your destruc-
tion.
Because the Greek laughs, because the Syrian mourns
(Both justly), this is true salvation

²⁰ Ibid., 87.

²¹ Ibid., 87.

²² Ibid., 87.

9. Bohemond and the Papacy

If Bohemond was the persona around which Emperor Alexius's thoughts most revolved during the First Crusade, the Norman was also the single individual who caused Pope Urban II the most consternation. This chapter will shed light on the relationship between the pope and the Norman and work to strengthen the thesis that, more than any singular individual, the papal goals of the First Crusade spun around Bohemond of Antioch. If, to Alexius, Bohemond was like a malevolent, pesky neighbor, then to Urban II he was like a prodigal son. The pope needed the southern Normans, and thus Bohemond, for protection from his many papal enemies in Rome. He probably even looked to Bohemond for counsel regarding the crusading movement. However, even though Bohemond entered the fray with papal blessing, he took matters beyond what Pope Urban had in mind on several occasions. By the time Urban had received the letter, ostensibly composed with help from all the major magnates after the fall of Antioch (but obviously scripted as an appeal from Bohemond,) the pope doubtlessly understood that his wily vassal had taken things far beyond his intention and had done more than his part to wreck the Latin-Eastern reunion movement.

The Norman adventurers who first came to the south of Italy were adventurers looking only for land, spoils, and the glory of conquest. Soon, however, the opportunists became state builders and “established a lasting and historically significant alliance with the papacy.”¹ As early as 1059, some of these Norman adventurers began to be officially

¹ Gordon S. Brown, *The Norman Conquest of Southern Italy and Sicily* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2003), 4.

granted the lands they had conquered in the name of the papacy, as the popes of early eleventh century claimed ancient legitimacy over the south of Italy. For example, Bohemond's father, Robert Guiscard, became Duke of Apulia, Calabria, and Sicily via papal enthronement.² Urban II and his successor, Paschal II, spent large parts of their pontificates in the Norman lands mainly because the Antipope Clement III (c. 1029-1100) (recognized by German Emperor Henry IV) was in control of Rome and, with his supporters, the surrounding countryside. During his travels through the south, Urban II held councils in at least four Norman-controlled cities.³ Bohemond was at the Melfi council and received Urban II at his own estate in Taranto. Thomas Asbridge insists that the Norman was, also, "probably" at the Council of Piacenza, where the initial call for help from the East to the West (laying the stage for the First Crusade) took place.⁴

Papal relations with the Normans aside, the letter Urban received from the consternate crusading magnates in September of 1098 begged him to bless their plans to separate themselves from the East entirely or to lead them himself, and this news must have caused him some hesitation. How startling it must have been, Krey suggests, to receive the letter supposedly written by all the crusading leaders but that "ended so clearly as a personal appeal from Bohemond."⁵ Krey insists that Pope Urban would have also been shocked by the magnates who commonly referred to eastern Christians as "heretics." From the letter, Urban surely understood that "Bohemond was at least contemplating, if not already set upon, a course which could only lead, if carried out, to a

² Paul Oldfield, *City and Community in Norman Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 19.

³ G.A. Loud, *The Latin Church in Norman Italy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 143.

⁴ Thomas Asbridge, *The First Crusade: A New History: The Roots of the Conflict Between Christianity and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 60.

⁵ A.C. Krey, "Urban's Crusade: Success or Failure, *The American Historical Review* 53, no.2 (1948): 235-250 at 240.

complete reversal of the [Church unification effort] policies which had hitherto been followed.”⁶ Pope Urban would have understood that Bohemond had woven his own self-serving schema into the text. The letter stressed Antioch’s Christian heritage and ensured the pope that papal endorsement of the city would only add to the growing global power of the Church.⁷ Bohemond had gone too far, and Urban II knew that he had. One of Pope Urban’s chief goals was to oversee the unification of the Western and Eastern Churches. He had already planned a council, at Bari, to discuss just such a union, and had another meeting in Rome planned for the following spring.⁸ In fact, the only things that seemed to be keeping Urban II and Bohemond from becoming fast allies were the former’s perpetual efforts to befriend the East and the latter’s self-serving attempts to stab the Empire in the back.⁹

In any event, Urban did not turn his back on the Latins or the scheming Bohemond, nor did his successor, Paschal II. These two popes created the institution of the crusade and defined exactly what made a venture a crusade – it had to be issued from, or at least endorsed by, the papacy. Peter Charanis writes: “The essence of that institution (the crusade), as we have said, was the fact that it could be authorized only by the papacy.”¹⁰ It is true that the crusade movement was put into practice by Pope Urban. He referred to his soldiers heading to the Levant as “soldiers of St. Peter.”¹¹ The term “crusaders,” however, was first used in the twelfth century, when the soldiers of Christ

⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁷ Asbridge, *The First Crusade*, 258-259.

⁸ Krey, “Urban’s Crusade,” 237.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁰ Peter Charanis, “Aims of the Medieval Crusades and How They Were Viewed by Byzantium,” *Church History* 21, no. 2 (1952): 122-134 at 169.

¹¹ Thomas F. Madden, *The New Concise History of the Crusades* (Lanham, MD.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 8.

began to be referred to as the *crucesignati* (“those signed by the cross”).¹² When, in 1095, Emperor Alexius first sent an envoy to request western aid against the Turks, Urban quickly understood that he could raise a large army to be used for his purposes; Alexius’s goal of beating back the Turks of Asia Minor would be a side road. Jerusalem would be the ultimate goal.

The papacy came to understand that crusading movements could be used not just against infidels, but against any real or supposed enemies of the Holy Office. “The crusade, as a consequence, became an instrument to be used by the papacy,” Madden writes.¹³ Indeed, crusades could, and did, come in many forms. They might be “used” against infidels in the Holy Land or against western heretics, or even, as in the case of Bohemond, against “schismatics as was the crusade of 1107.”¹⁴ Of course, as was his nature, Bohemond broke the mold with his crusading enterprise, as he alone preached his crusade.

Whatever Urban II and his successor came to understand about the crusades, Bohemond took it upon himself to carry his role farther than either intended – to the point that he altered the way in which the institution of the crusade was perceived and utilized. Bohemond paved the path for other crusaders to seize large principalities for themselves. He even pleaded with a pope (Paschal II) to endorse an expedition to be used against the very individual that had first called upon the Franks for help against the infidel (Emperor Alexius). If, as Krey points out, the pope's instructions had been carried out as they were intended, the prospect of a union between the Greek and Latin churches would have at least taken a step closer to fruition. This union had been foremost in Urban’s mind since

¹² Ibid., 1.

¹³ Ibid., 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 1.

the issue was debated at the Council of Bari in the fall of 1098 and he looked forward to an opportunity to renew the discussion the following spring in Rome. As Krey argues, the opportunity was lost, or rather defeated, however, “by the unbridled ambition of one man, Bohemond.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Krey, “Urban’s Crusade,” 248.

10. Bohemond and Posterity - Conclusion

The First Crusade is understood to be the only one that truly accomplished the goals it had laid out, and Bohemond was the greatest of its military leaders. To judge the prince harshly for his longing for booty and property, one must ignore the same motivations in every man who took up the cross, knight and peasant alike. Piety, a desire for personal salvation, and the hope for riches were the crusading attractions that went hand-in-hand for all participants. The briefest glance at the sources will illuminate Bohemond's desire for plunder and fame. A closer study will bring his true desire into focus. The Norman's entire life was dedicated to the prospect of agitating, and even gaining control of, the Byzantine Empire. His crusading foray was not a side road moving away from this goal, but rather it was a divergent path leading back towards it. The fact that this conduit failed to carry Bohemond to his desired location does not take away from the equally recognizable fact that the Norman more than contributed to the success of the First Crusade. After all, when Urban II appealed to his flock for help against the Saracen threat, what he wanted, and needed, were violent men of action, no matter where their motivations were laid.

Bohemond's motivations were, nonetheless, among the most complex of any crusader in any crusade. Jonathan Riley-Smith reminds us: "He [Bohemond] seems to have been genuinely pious, but was also ambitious and desired honor."¹ The Norman was wealthier than most crusaders, yet was still nursing the wounds caused by his

¹ Jonathan Riley-Smith, "The Motives of the Earliest Crusaders and the Settlement of Latin Palestine," *The English Historical Review* 98, no. 389 (1983): 721-736 at 733.

disinheritance. Indeed, motivations aside, even the actions of Bohemond remain controversial. From a military point of view, his seizing of Antioch was helpful and could be considered almost necessary. A major crusading magnate staying behind to defend the lines back through Asia Minor and Christian territory made sense. Of course, breaking the emperor's oath and removing all traces of Greek authority in the principality was a contentious act to say the least and one which set back amalgamation between the Churches.²

Before mounting the first siege tower at Amalfi, Bohemond's entire life had prepared him as much for a leadership role in the First Crusade as it had to battle the Byzantines. Fighting against, and alongside, Muslims and imperials alike, the young prince had learned to make merciless war on a heroic scale, orchestrate grand movements, and command mighty forces. His name, and notoriety, was as valuable to the Western papacy as it was a source of anxiety for the eastern governorship. Before relinquishing unambiguous control of the expedition, after Nicaea, Alexius could hardly draw an easy breath without considering how it might affect the empire's fluctuating relationship with Bohemond. The papacy, likewise, remained as unclear about Bohemond's motives as it was supportive.

On Crusade, Bohemond was indispensable. His well-timed charges repelled sultan and emir alike. His crafty politicking continually nudged the faithful in the direction he wanted them to go: forward, at his own pace and towards his own goals. The First Crusade succeeded because of Bohemond. The Crusaders who actually marched on the Holy City took it because Bohemond kept them alive and intact enough to have the chance. The Principality of Antioch was created by Bohemond and ruled by his Norman

² Ibid., 733.

ancestors for 170 years, which was a longer period than the Normans ruled either England (88 years) or Sicily (122 years). In spite of his self-promotion and ambition, the Kingdom of Jerusalem arose, then, because of Bohemond of Taranto.

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