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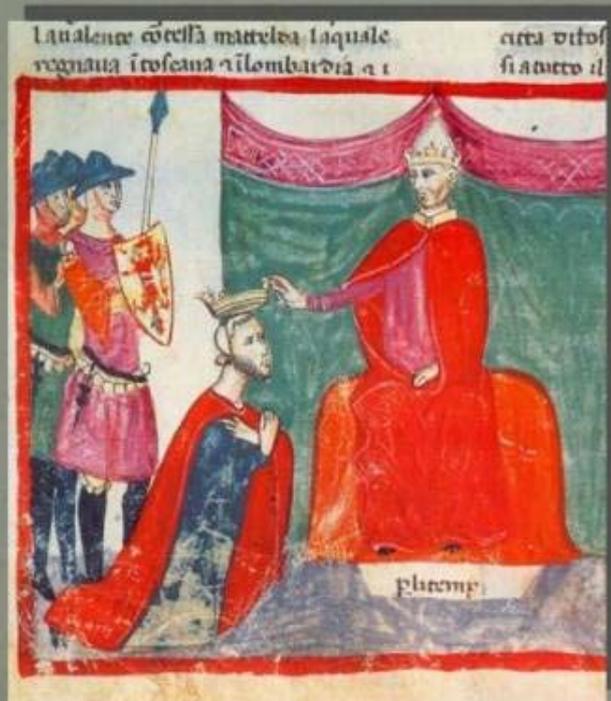
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University of Glasgow

Department of History

Doctoral thesis: "The campaigns of the Norman dukes of southern Italy against Byzantium, in the years between 1071 and 1108 A.D."



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Glasgow, January 2010

The topic of my thesis is “The campaigns of the Norman dukes of southern Italy to Byzantium, in the years between 1071 and 1108 A.D.” As the title suggests, I am examining all the main campaigns conducted by the Normans against Byzantine provinces, in the period from the fall of Bari, the Byzantine capital of Apulia and the seat of the Byzantine governor (*catepano*) of Italy in 1071, to the Treaty of Devol that marked the end of Bohemond of Taranto’s Illyrian campaign in 1108. My thesis, however, aims to focus specifically on the military aspects of these confrontations, an area which for this period has been surprisingly neglected in the existing secondary literature.

My intention is to give answers to a series of questions, of which only some of them are presented here: what was the Norman method of raising their armies and what was the connection of this particular system to that in Normandy and France in the same period (similarities, differences, if any)? Have the Normans been willing to adapt to the Mediterranean reality of warfare, meaning the adaptation of siege engines and the creation of a transport and fighting fleet? What was the composition of their armies, not only in numbers but also in the analogy of cavalry, infantry and supplementary units? While in the field of battle, what were the fighting tactics used by the Normans against the Byzantines and were they superior to their eastern opponents?

However, as my study is in essence comparative, I will further compare the Norman and Byzantine military institutions, analyse the clash of these two different military cultures and distinguish any signs of adaptations in their practice of warfare. Also, I will attempt to set this enquiry in the light of new approaches to medieval military history visible in recent historiography by asking if any side had been familiar to the ideas of Vegetian strategy, and if so, whether we characterise any of these strategies as Vegetian?

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of abbreviations	
Introduction	1
1. Primary sources and the problems of military history.	9
2. Norman military institutions in southern Italy in the eleventh century: problems and comparisons.	46
3. Castle-service and castle-building in Normandy, England and southern Italy: a contextual study.	71
4. The Byzantine Army of the tenth and eleventh centuries.	84
5. The structure and operational role of the Byzantine Navy in the tenth and eleventh centuries.	135
6. The political and military organization of Byzantine Italy before the arrival of the Normans.	147
7. The establishment of the Normans in southern Italy and Sicily (1017-77).	154
8. Robert Guiscard's invasion of Illyria. The first stage, from the capitulation of Corfu to the victory over the Byzantine army (spring – autumn 1081).	191
9. The second stage of the Norman invasion. From the capture of Dyrrachium to the siege of Larisa (spring 1082 – winter 1083).	231
10. Robert Guiscard's second invasion of Illyria. From autumn 1084 to Robert Guiscard's death in the summer of 1085.	249
11. Bohemond of Taranto and the First Crusade.	259
12. Bohemond of Taranto's invasion of Illyria (1107-8).	280
Conclusions	302
Bibliography	312
Maps, photos and illustrations	

ABBREVIATIONS

- Alexiad *Annae Comnenae Alexiadis libri XV*, annotationes addidit Ludovicus Schopenus, 2 vols., E. Weber, Bonn, 1839-1878.
- Amatus *L'ystoire de li Normant et la Chronique de Robert Viscart par Aimé, moine du Mont-Cassin*, ed. by M. Champollion-Figeac, Jules Renouard, Paris, 1835.
- Anon. Bar.* Anonymous Baresnes, *Chronicon*, *RIS*, v. 151.
- Attaleiates Michaelis Attaliothae, *Historia*, *CSHB*, vol. 47, ed. I. Bekker, E. Weber, Bonn, 1853.
- Cecaumenos Cecaumenus, *Strategicon*, ed. B. Wassiliewsky, V. Jernstedt, Hakkert, Amsterdam, 1965.
- CHBS* *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire c. 500-1492*, ed. J. Shepard, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008.
- Chronic. Casin.* *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*, *MGH, SS*, vol. 34.
- CSHB* *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae*, Bonnae, 1828-97.
- De Cerimoniis* Constantinus Porphyrogenitus, *De Cerimoniis Aulae Byzantinae*, *CSHB*, vols. 5-6, ed. I. Reiski, E. Weber, Bonn, 1829-30.
- Gesta* Guillaume De Pouille, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, ed. and tr. by Marguerite Mathieu, Instituto Siciliano di Studi Byzantini et Neoellenici, Palermo, 1961.
- Hill and Hill Raymond D'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, tr. J.H. Hill and L. Hill, The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1968.
- Leo VI, *Tactica* *Tou Sophotatou Basileos Leontos ta eupiskomena panta; Leonis, romanorum imperatoris Augusti, cognomine sapientis, Opera quae reperiri potuerunt omnia, nunc primum in unum corpus collecta*,

Patrologia Cursus Completus – Series Graeca, vol. 107, ed. J.P. Migne, Paris, 1863.

- Lupus Protospatharius Lupus Protospatharius, *Chronicon rerum in regno Neapolitano gestarum*, *MGH, SS*, vol. 60.
- Malaterra Goffredus Malaterra, *De Rebus Gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardi Ducis Fratris Eius*, *RIS*, vol. 6.
- MGH, SS* *Monumenta Germaniae historica inde ab anno Christi quingentesimo usque ad annum millesimum et quingentesimum. Scriptores*, auspiciis Societatis Aperiendis Fontibus rerum Germanicarum Medii Aevi ed. G. H. Pertz, Hahn, Hannover, 1826-.
- OHBS* *The Oxford handbook of Byzantine studies*, ed. E. Jeffreys, J. Haldon, R. Cormack, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008.
- On Skirmishing* *The Anonymous Byzantine Treatise On Skirmishing by the Emperor Lord Nicephoros*, in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, tr. G.T. Dennis, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C., 2008.
- On Strategy* *The Anonymous Byzantine Treatise On Strategy*, in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*.
- On Tactics* *The Anonymous Book on Tactics*, in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*.
- Orderic Vitalis *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. M. Chibnall, (6 vols.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1969-80.
- Praecepta Militaria* *Presentation and Composition on Warfare of the Emperor Nicephoros*, in *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, tr. and ed. by E. McGeer, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, 1995.
- Psellus Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, tr. E.R.A. Sewter, Penguin, London, 1966.

- R.H.C. Oc.* *Recueil des historiens des Croisades, Historiens occidentaux*, par les soins de l'Académie royale des inscriptions et belles-lettres, Imprimerie Royale, Paris, 1844-95.
- RIS* *Rerum Italicarum scriptores: raccolta degli storici Italiani dal cinquecento al millecinquecento*, ordinata da L.A. Muratori, Lapi, Città di Castello, 1900-.
- Romuald of Salerno Romualdus Salernitatis, *Chronicon*, *RIS*, vol. 7.
- Sewter Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, tr. E.R.A. Sewter, Penguin, London 2003.
- Skylitzes Ioannes Skylitzes, Georgius Cedrenus, *Synopsis Historiarum*, *CSHB*, vols. 34, 35, ed. I. Bekker, E. Weber, Bonn, 1838-39.
- Vegetius *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*, tr. by N.P. Milner, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2001.

Introduction

In my thesis *The campaigns of the Norman dukes of southern Italy against Byzantium, in the period between 1071-1108 A.D.*, I intend to examine all the main campaigns conducted by the Normans in the Byzantine Empire's western Balkan provinces, in the period from the fall of Bari, the capital of Byzantine Longobardia (Italy) and the seat of the Byzantine governor of Italy in 1071, to the Treaty of Devol that marked the end of Bohemond of Taranto's Illyrian campaign in 1108.

It aims to focus specifically on the military aspects of the Norman infiltration in the south, a research area which for this period has been relatively neglected by existing scholarship. Two of the classic publications for this period are Ferdinand Chalandon's *Histoire de la Domination Normande en Italie et en Sicile* and his *Essai sur le Règne d'Alexis Ier Comnène (1081-1118)*.¹ Even after more than a century of its publication, Chalandon's *Domination Normande* remains one of the best accounts of the Norman establishment in southern Italy, with the first volume examining the political and social developments in the dukedom of Apulia up to Roger II's accession in 1128. Chalandon's *Essai sur le Règne d'Alexis Ier Comnène* examines the reign of Alexius Comnenus from his accession to the throne to his death, with the third chapter of this study dealing with Robert Guiscard's 1081-5 invasion of Illyria. Chalandon's works, along with R.B. Yewdale's *Bohemond I, Prince of Antioch*,² are two of the oldest and most useful works I was able to use in my research.

However, a number of views expressed both by Chalandon and Yewdale on the general social-political context of the events they analyse, such as the relation between Guiscard and his vassal counts, or Bohemond's dealings with Alexius Comnenus, have been challenged by

¹ F. Chalandon, *Histoire de la domination normande en Italie et en Sicile*, 2 vols., Picard, Paris, 1907; idem, *Essai sur le Règne d'Alexis Ier Comnène, 1081-1118*, Picard, Paris, 1900.

² R.B. Yewdale, *Bohemond I, Prince of Antioch*, Hakkert, Amsterdam, 1970; the most recent study about Bohemond: J. Flori, *Bohémond d'Antioch, Chevalier d'Aventure*, Payot, Paris, 2007.

Graham Loud in his recent *The Age of Robert Guiscard*.³ Although being undoubtedly an expert in the political, social, economic and religious history of the Italian peninsula in the eleventh century, Loud does not claim to be a military historian of this period. His chapter on the Papacy and southern Italy (1060-80) is useful in explaining the political and diplomatic relations between Guiscard, Rome and Germany on the eve of the 1081 invasion, but the following section on the Norman attack on Byzantium focuses on diplomacy with no detailed attention being paid on the actual military operations. In addition the author limits his analysis to Italy, and does not follow Robert Guiscard's exploits in the Balkans in detail. Thus, although the *Age of Robert Guiscard*, along with Huguette Taviani-Carozzi's French edition of the *La terreur du monde, Robert Guiscard et la conquete Normande en Italie*,⁴ consist two of the best accounts on the southern Italian history in the eleventh century and beyond, the military aspect of the Norman infiltration plays a rather secondary role.

Of direct relevance is A.G. Savvides' *Byzantino-Normannica. The Norman Capture of Italy and the First Two Norman Invasions in Byzantium*.⁵ This short study is very useful as it provides a very detailed bibliography of relevant Greek, English, German and French titles for this period. Savvides also pays significant attention to the geography and topography of the regions where the Norman invasions took place, thus being able to clarify certain vague points linked to information given by our primary sources. However, this monograph reads

³ G.A. Loud, *The Age of Robert Guiscard: Southern Italy and the Norman Conquest*, Longman, London, 2000.

⁴ H. Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde, Robert Guiscard et la conquete Normande en Italie*, Fayard, Paris, 1996; I have been unable to consult R. Bunemann, *Robert Guiskard 1015-1085. Eine Normanner erobert Suditalianen*, Cologne, 1997. The references in my thesis to German works are citations from other studies in the field or came as a result of the kind help from friends and colleagues.

⁵ A.G.C. Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica. The Norman Capture of Italy and the First Two Norman Invasions in Byzantium*, Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, Leuven, 2007. I would like to thank Professor Loud for sending me his review of Savvides' monograph.

like a simple narrative of the events, with no serious questioning of the sources, while the author does not pay any attention to the major battles of this period.

Thus, for this particular part of my research I intend to give answers to a series of questions. What were the Norman methods of raising their armies in southern Italy and what similarities can we identify with Normandy and France in the same period? What were the numbers and consistency of the Norman armies in Italy, Sicily and Illyria? What was their operational role in the rebel armies of the Lombards until 1041? What were the battle-tactics of the Normans in this theatre of war and how innovative were they in comparison to contemporary warfare in France? Were battle-tactics more important than numbers in the battlefields of Italy, Sicily and Illyria? What was the role played by their leadership in this matter?

As my study is in essence comparative, I will further compare the Norman military organization and institutions with the Byzantine ones in relation to another series of questions: in what way were these two military systems different and which one appears to have been working more efficiently in the second half of the eleventh century? What light do these campaigns throw on the clash of two different types of military structures and how far did this prolonged confrontation lead to changes or adaptations in their practice of warfare? I will ask if we can characterise the Normans strategy in specific operational theatres – like Italy, Sicily and Illyria – as Vegetian.⁶ In relation to this issue, separate questions will be asked about the importance of military handbooks, like Leo VI's *Tactica* and Nicephoros Phocas' *Praecepta Militaria*, for the Byzantine military establishment of the eleventh century and whether any of them were available to Byzantine commanders of this period like Alexius

⁶ J. Gillingham, "Richard I and the Science of War in the Middle Ages", *War and Government in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. Gillingham and J.C. Holt, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1984, 78-91; "'Up with Orthodoxy!' In Defence of Vegetian Warfare", *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2 (2004), 149-58; S. Morillo, "Battle Seeking: The Context and Limits of Vegetian Strategy", *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1 (2003), 21-41; C.J. Rogers, "The Vegetian 'Science of Warfare' in the Middle Ages", *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1 (2003), 1-19.

Comnenus. What sort of information about their enemies were these manuals providing the Byzantine officers with?

Before going into a detailed examination of the two military systems in southern Italy and Byzantium, an analysis of the use and value of the primary sources is essential.⁷ I will discuss the main Latin and Greek sources of the eleventh and twelfth century, such as Amatus of Montecassino, Orderic Vitalis, William of Apulia, Geoffrey Malaterra, Anna Comnena and others that provide the most information about the Norman establishment in Italy and their Illyrian expeditions. In particular, I will examine their accuracy in relation to military events, and the description of the battles and sieges.

In the second part of my thesis I will deal with the military organization of the Norman Dukedom of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily and the Byzantine Empire. Beginning with the Normans, the main problem for every historian of the period is the lack of primary material that can shed light to the administrative system introduced in the Peninsula in the second half of the eleventh century. Scholars like Cahen, Chalandon, Martin, Taviani-Carozzi and Loud have studied the introduction of feudal institutions in the south but a significant question still remains unanswered, mainly due to the absence of charter evidence and primary material before the turn of the century; were military institutions like the *arrière-ban* or the *service d'host* introduced in Italy as well, and if so, what examples of their use do we have? This question almost immediately takes us to another issue which is the use of household and enfeoffed troops in the Norman expansion in Italy and Sicily; what was the role of these troops in the major Norman campaigns in the Italian Peninsula and across the Adriatic in the

⁷ My bibliography of primary sources extends from ninth to twelfth century Latin, Greek, Armenian, Arabic and Scandinavian sources, most of them translated into English or French, but a substantial number of them had to be translated by myself. For any charter material available for the Norman establishment in Italy in the eleventh century I had to rely mostly on the editions of Trinchera, F. Nitti, C. Cahen, R. Menager, M. Fauroux and the rich material provided by Loud's *The Age of Robert Guiscard*, J.-M. Martin's *La Pouille du Vie au XII siècle* and Taviani-Carozzi's *La terreur du monde*.

eleventh century? In order to give answers to these questions, some contextual discussion is necessary of Norman military institutions to establish what patterns the Normans in Italy may have drawn on. And since no territorial expansion can be complete and secure without the establishment of some kind of fortified sites, I aim to explore the building of new fortifications in Apulia, Calabria and Sicily in relation with the parallel development of several specific types of defences, like the motte-and-bailey castle in France and Normandy in the same period.

The secondary bibliography about the organization of the Byzantine Army of the *Epigonoï* (1025-1081) is surprisingly limited. Detailed works by Haldon and Treadgold that examine the structure, consistency, battle-tactics and formations of the Byzantine Army do not always take their analysis up to 1081.⁸ The deeper reason for this, however, is the lack of credible evidence from the primary sources and charter material after the death of Basil II (1025), a period of neglect and serious decline in the army. Thus, in order for me to present a clear view of the Byzantine army's structure, consistency and numbers on the eve of Robert Guiscard's siege of Dyrrachium, I must take my analysis back to 1025 and examine several points; the decline of the thematic and tagmatic institutions; the geopolitical developments in the Balkans and Asia Minor and the military defeats of Byzantine arms in this period, in an attempt to give answers to a number of questions, including whether any of these defeats were significant enough to destroy a large part of the Imperial army? What were the consequences of the great territorial losses of the Empire in the second half of the century? The same attempt to reconstruct and piece together the evidence that we have from the primary sources will be done for the units of the Imperial navy in two separate periods, from 1025 to 1081 and from 1081 to 1108. As a supplementary chapter to the aforementioned section, I will present the military organization of the theme of Longobardia on the eve of the Norman arrival in Italy.

⁸ W. Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army, 284-1081*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1995; J. Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society in the Byzantine World, 565-1204*, UCL Press, London, 1999.

The final point before going into the Norman expeditions to Illyria will be to examine the numbers, consistency, battle-tactics and diplomatic alliances of the Normans from their first appearance in Italy in the second decade of the eleventh century to the 1070s. I divided this part of my thesis thematically into three distinct sections dealing with: the major siege-operations conducted by the Normans from the capture of Reggio (1059) to the siege of Salerno (1077) and Naples (1078); the naval operations, focusing on the transportation of the Norman army to Sicily in 1061; and the pitched battles fought in the major operational theatres in Apulia and Sicily against the Byzantines, the Muslims and the Papal-Lombard coalition of 1053.

These chapters form the background to the second part of my thesis which deals with the Norman campaigns in Illyria and the Greek mainland. But to be fully aware of the significant developments in the battlefields of Dyrrachium, Ioannina and Larissa, the political, social, economic and diplomatic background of these campaigns have to be addressed. As is evident from the titles of several chapters in my thesis I attempt to present several major points concerning the wider socio-political context of the Norman infiltration in the south and the Byzantine period of the *Epigonoï* relatively briefly but with as many significant details as possible due to the limited length of this study. Thus, for example, I could not present all the major geopolitical events in the Balkans or Asia Minor or the defeats of the Imperial Army since 1025, nor refer to the naval tactics of the Imperial Navy in detail, as seen through Leo's *Tactica*.

For the Norman expeditions in the southern Balkans, my research will focus on the series of comparative questions already mentioned that have to do with the strategy and battle tactics applied by both the Norman and the Byzantines. My primary objective is first to analyse the military institutions on both sides of the Adriatic in the second half of the eleventh century, the military organization of the Normans and the Byzantines and the basic structure and consistency of their armies along with their main battlefield tactics. Next, I will examine three particular campaigns in the period between the years 1071 and 1108. The first of these is the invasion conducted in the Byzantine province of Illyria by Robert Guiscard the

Duke of Apulia, Calabria and Sicily, when he landed in the Epirotic coast opposite the island of Corfu, in the early summer of 1081, and proceeded to the siege and capture of the strategic city-port of Dyrrachium, in November 1081, after beating the Imperial army in a battle in the outskirts of the city a few weeks before. For the years 1082-3, with the absence of Robert Guiscard to Italy, his son Bohemond was left in charge of the Norman army. He campaigned throughout Epirus and Western Macedonia and reached as far as Thessaly and Arta, deep in the Greek mainland, laying siege to the city of Larissa, until he was defeated by Alexius Comnenus' army in the summer of 1083.

The second campaign is the invasion of Illyria under Robert Guiscard which took place in the autumn of 1084. The Norman forces, after defeating a Byzantino-Venetian naval squadron in Corfiot waters and relieving the besieged garrison of the Corfiot citadel, prepared to take advantage of their success and proceed to the capture of the island of Cephalonia – the capital of the thema of the Ionian Sea islands. Thus, from a strategic point of view it can be seen that Robert Guiscard did not target Thessaloniki like in 1081, but rather the economic centres of the southern Greek mainland, namely Athens, Corinth and Thebes. However, his sudden death on the 17th July 1085 put an abrupt end to his campaign which was abandoned almost immediately.

The third and final campaign I analyse is that of Bohemond of Taranto, Guiscard's first-born son from his first wife Alberada, who, after taking part in the First Crusade and being proclaimed Prince of Antioch – officially in March 1099 – launched an invasion of Illyria in the year 1107, with the first target of his invading army once more being Dyrrachium. However, Emperor Alexius, after his valuable experience twenty six years before, did not seek a battle but resorted to the blockade of the Norman camp by land and sea. After the starvation that crippled the Norman army, Bohemond sought peace terms which resulted in the Treaty of Devol in 1108.

The study of the battle-tactics employed by two distinctively different military cultures in a specific military theatre will serve to underline the degree of adaptability of each one of them and to what extent we can point to a flow of military ideas from one coast of the

Adriatic to the other. In a sense, these three battles should be examined along with the chapter on Bohemond's participation in the First Crusade, in order to point out the differences, if any, in the strategy and battle-tactic mentality of both the Normans and the Byzantines. Contacts between Norman Italy and Byzantium did exist since the middle of the century, even though the last pitched battle between Norman and Imperial troops occurred in 1041, and both sides chose to confront each other close to Dyrrachium, with the Norman cavalry charge winning the day over the elite footsoldiers of the Varangians. But there is no repetition of the same mistake by Alexius outside Larisa (1083) and Dyrrachium (1108), with the lessons of 1081 and the First Crusade obviously being learned. Thus, there is a great value in studying the Norman-Byzantine clashes in the Balkans during the last decades of the eleventh century, for we can understand a great deal about the strategic mentality of the Normans and the Byzantines and how each military system coped with the challenges posed by such operations.

1. Primary sources and the problems of military history

The objective of this chapter is to examine the main primary sources of my doctoral thesis – Latin, Greek, Armenian, Arabic and Scandinavian. In the first section of this chapter I will examine the three major “Italian-Norman” chroniclers, namely Amatus of Montecassino, William of Apulia, and Geoffrey Malaterra, followed by Orderic Vitalis, whose account is valuable in establishing the links between Normandy and Italy, and Anna Comnena who is our most detailed Byzantine source for the reign of her father Alexius. I will focus my analysis on the chroniclers’ social, religious and educational background, the date and place of the compilation of their work, their own sources and the way they collected their information from them, their bias and sympathies and, thus, their impartiality as historians. Other eleventh or twelfth century chroniclers who also provide useful information of relevance will also be more briefly discussed. This section will be followed by a comparative analysis of Anna Comnena, William of Apulia and Geoffrey Malaterra as military historians where I will examine their work strictly through a military perspective.

Amatus of Montecassino

The *History of the Normans*,⁹ compiled by Amatus of Montecassino around the year 1080, is the earliest chronicle material we have for the Norman establishment in southern Italy and

⁹ *L'ystoire de li Normant et la Chronique de Robert Viscart par Aimé, moine du Mont-Cassin*, ed. by M. Champollion-Figeac, J. Renouard, Paris, 1835; from hereafter: Amatus; the main secondary works for Amatus’ life and work are: Amatus of Montecassino, *The History of the Normans*, tr. P. Dunbar and revised with notes by G. Loud, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2004, pp. 1-38; from hereafter: *The History of the Normans*; K.B. Wolf, *Making History, The Normans and their Historians in eleventh-century Italy*, University of Philadelphia Press, Philadelphia, 1995, pp. 87-122; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 15-7; E. Albu, *The Normans in their Histories: Propaganda, Myth and Subversion*, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2001, pp. 106-44; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xxxi-xxxiv.

Sicily, from its earliest stages in the 1010s to the death of Richard I of Capua on 5th April 1078. The author provides little information about himself in his work and almost everything we know about Amatus comes from the continuator of the *Chronica monasterii Casinensis* up to AD 1139, Peter the Deacon, and a work he authored himself, *The Deeds of the Apostles Peter and Paul* dedicated to Gregory VII and probably written just before the composition of the *History*, around 1078/9. He may have come originally from the area of Salerno,¹⁰ joining the monastery of Montecassino as an adult during the rule of Abbot Desiderius (1058-86) and witnessing firsthand the intellectual revival of the period. The original Latin text has been lost and Amatus' *History* survives only in a fourteenth century French translation where the translator have either omitted, summarised or paraphrased parts of the original text or added comments of his own.¹¹ Amatus was a contemporary, living in the monastery of Monte-Cassino which was in close proximity to the Norman principality of Aversa and he was, therefore, an eye witness of the events he describes or, at least, he had access to people who were there in the events while he must also have had access to Monte-Cassino's archive material.

From the dedication of his work to Abbot Desiderius we understand that Richard I of Capua (d. 1078) and Robert Guiscard (d. 1085) are the protagonists of Amatus' work.¹² In Amatus' *History* the Normans were launching a Holy War against the Muslims that were holding Christian lands (Sicily), while against the Byzantines he viewed them as "liberators who called on the assistance of God" against these "effeminate" oppressors.¹³ And it is made

¹⁰ *The History of the Normans*, pp. 11-12; Wolf, *Making History*, p. 88.

¹¹ *The History of the Normans*, pp. 18-23; Wolf, *Making History*, pp. 89-90; Albu, *The Normans in their Histories*, pp. 109-110.

¹² Amatus, "Prohème de lo Storiographe, a lo molt reverent et Saint Messire Désidère, serve de li servicial toe", pp. 1-4; "Dedication to the most Holy and Reverend Master Desiderius, Servant of His Servants", *The History of the Normans*, pp. 41-2.

¹³ Amatus, I. 21.

clear through Amatus' writings that the Normans had received Divine favour only because they trusted their future in His hands.¹⁴

The *History of the Normans* is divided into eight books, beginning with a brief introduction as to who were the Normans and how and why they came to Apulia, and ending with Robert Guiscard's siege and capture of Salerno (1076/7) and the death of Richard I of Capua in 1078. Each book covers a period of seven to eight years but the dating in Amatus' work is problematic. He rarely provides us with any dates in his account and in the few cases where he does he simply mentions the day of the month and not the year. This problem becomes more acute because of the author's method of not following a strict chronological order in his narrative, but rather finishes an individual story by reaching to its conclusion and then carries on with the events that should have preceded it. One characteristic example is when Amatus narrates the victory of the Normans at Castrogiovanni in 1061 and he immediately goes on to the siege and capture of Bari, while between Bari and the capture of Palermo there is the first half of book VI that interferes.¹⁵ This thematic approach makes Amatus' work difficult to use as a source by itself and it certainly needs to be examined in combination with the other two of his contemporaries, Malaterra and William of Apulia.

William of Apulia

The first of the "Italian-Norman" chroniclers who narrated Robert Guiscard's expeditions to Illyria was William of Apulia, with his *Gesta Roberti Guiscardi* being the only work of the period that focuses on the achievements of the Duke of Apulia.¹⁶ Judging by his name,

¹⁴ *The History of the Normans*, pp. 24-5.

¹⁵ Amatus, V. 24-28, VI. 14; *The History of the Normans*, pp. 36-7.

¹⁶ Guillaume De Pouille, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, ed. and tr. by M. Mathieu, Istituto Siciliano di Studi Byzantini et Neoellenici, Palermo, 1961; from hereafter: *Gesta*; the main secondary works are: *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, introduction by M. Mathieu, pp. 3-96; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xxxviii-xl; Wolf, *Making History*, pp. 123-42;

Guillermus, we assume that he would have had Norman ancestors, although that name was known to Italy even before the coming of the Normans.¹⁷ Also, from letters that he wrote to Pope Urban II, we can see that he was French, although not necessarily from Normandy.¹⁸ His last name, *Apuliensis*, suggests he was a Norman who was born in Apulia, probably at Giovenazzo.¹⁹ William is writing his work certainly between the years 1088-1111, judging from the people to whom this work is dedicated, namely Pope Urban II (1088 - June 1099) and Roger Borsa (1085-1111) – Robert Guiscard’s heir to his Dukedom. However, certain textual references help us narrow down this period to 1095 – August 1099.²⁰

He seems to have been a member of Roger Borsa’s court and probably a layman, assuming from the rare appearances of religious motifs in his work and his passionate interest in the art of war.²¹ He was very much aware of the importance of certain military factors in campaigns, such as composition of forces, battle-plans and siege equipment like, for example, in the battle of Civitate and the sieges of Bari and Dyrrachium.²² But apart from this sparse evidence about his life, William of Apulia’s full identity remains elusive. If he was indeed a member of Roger Borsa’s court, he would have access, like Anna Comnena, to certain high-ranking officials of the dukedom. He must have been able to talk to the veterans of Robert Guiscard’s campaigns or even to Roger himself, who had participated, among others, in the second Illyrian invasion in 1084. However, the writer does not mention, unlike Anna, where he gets his information from.²³

Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 20-3; Albu, *The Normans in their Histories*, pp. 106-44.

¹⁷ *Gesta*, p. 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁹ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. xxxix.

²⁰ *Gesta*, p. 11; Wolf, *Making History*, pp. 123-4; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. xxxix .

²¹ Albu, *The Normans in their Histories*, pp. 136-7.

²² *Gesta*, II. 122-256, pp. 139-147; II. 480-573, pp. 159-163; IV. 235-448, pp. 217-229.

²³ *Gesta*, p. 26.

William uses his first two of the five books of the *Gesta* as an introduction, dealing with the establishment of the Normans in Italy from 1012 until the capture of Bari in 1071. The third book covers the period from 1071 until 1080, while the last two books of William's work focus on Guiscard's invasion of Byzantium (1080-85). In his description of the Normanno-Byzantine confrontations in Apulia, it is most likely that William was indeed an eyewitness, but he did not know much of what was taking place in Campania or Sicily, based on the fact that he is very brief for everything that did not concern his homeland.²⁴ Apart from the events that he had witnessed, he had certainly used the lost *Annales Barenses* which Lupus Protospatharius had used in his *Chronicon*,²⁵ and although it was generally believed that Amatus' *History* had been used as well, more recent studies have shown that they both wrote their works independently with the material from the *Annales Barenses* being the only link between them.²⁶ William has based his narrative of the Illyrian invasions on oral testimonies from eye witnesses, but these sources are not identified and we cannot be certain whether he got his information from knights, footsoldiers or just men who had followed the army in the baggage train. The sole exception is his mentioning of one source, which had also been used by Anna, a Latin envoy called Jean who was sent by the Bishop of Bari to travel with the Norman army.²⁷

The two people, to whom William's work is dedicated, as he points out in the prologue and epilogue of the *Gesta*, are Roger Borsa, Duke of Apulia and Calabria (1085-1111), and Pope Urban II (1088-99). It is quite possible that Roger Borsa commissioned the writing of the *Gesta*, not only to immortalise his father's achievements in Italy and Greece, but also to solidify his claims as heir to the duchy of Apulia against those of his older half-brother Bohemond. As to why he chose William is unknown, but the fact the latter was a Norman

²⁴ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. xl.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xxxix.

²⁶ *Gesta*, pp. 26-38; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xxxix; Albu, *The Normans in their Histories*, p. 110.

²⁷ *Gesta*, pp. 38-9; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. xl; *Alexis Ier*, p. xii.

who might also have had Lombard roots and who had grown up in an area that included the Byzantines, gave him great advantage over others. Roger Borsa's influence in the *Gesta* is great and focuses mainly on two points. First, where William is referring to the legitimate succession of the dukedom of Apulia by Roger, after the death of Guiscard at Cephalonia in 1085, and thus strengthening his claims over Bohemond's.²⁸ Second, where the author narrates Guiscard's campaigns against Alexius we can clearly see an attempt to make this part of the *Gesta* more "pleasant" to the ears of Roger.²⁹

Although William was commissioned by Roger Borsa and was under the "protection" of Urban II, Marguerite Mathieu believed that: "his impartiality, his neutrality is remarkable" and that "the author is generally objective, although certain tendencies for concealing things do exist."³⁰ However, by contrasting William's narratives of the Sicilian and Illyrian campaigns, we get a sense of strong disapproval of Robert Guiscard's quest across the Adriatic. We have to bear in mind that William was writing his work at a period of religious enthusiasm due to the launch of the First Crusade and when the Byzantines were still considered as allies and the natural leaders of Crusade.³¹ Unlike Malaterra – who was writing shortly after the Crusade – or Amatus, William does not accuse the Byzantines of being effeminate warriors who do not deserve to hold Apulia for themselves and, in fact, he even deflates Guiscard's pretext of invading Apulia to restore Michael VII Doukas to the Imperial throne.³² Finally, William narrates the public anger over the conscription of footsoldiers from all the corners of Apulia and Calabria, identifying them as a group which was against the war

²⁸ *Gesta*, V. 345-348, p. 255.

²⁹ For example, Roger's key role at the naval battle with the Venetians; *ibid.*, V. 155-198, pp. 245-7.

³⁰ *Gesta*, pp. 22, 27.

³¹ William would not have been aware of Alexius' return to Constantinople from Philomelium, in spring 1098.

³² *Gesta*, IV. 246-63, pp. 216-8.

with the Byzantines, contrary to Malaterra's report of fear of the unknown only troubling the minds of his knights.³³

Geoffrey Malaterra

Geoffrey Malaterra,³⁴ or a monk³⁵ named Geoffrey who bore the "cognomen" Malaterra from his ancestors, was the third chronicler who had decided to commemorate the conquest of Italy and Sicily by the Normans in the late eleventh century, and indeed the only one whose main focus is Roger Hauteville. Although we know very little of Malaterra's life, he himself noted he had come from a region "beyond the mountains", that is the Alps, and that he had recently become a Sicilian.³⁶ It is possible that he was born in Normandy, although recent studies have cast doubt on Pontieri's conviction that Malaterra was indeed a Norman simply because the chronicler refers to the Norman knights as *nostri*.³⁷ It is, however, almost certain that he came to Sicily at the request of Count Roger who wished to re-establish the power of the Latin church in the island right after its complete conquest from the Muslims in

³³ *Gesta*, IV. 128-33, p. 210; Malaterra, 3. 24.

³⁴ Goffredus Malaterra, *De Rebus Gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae Comitis et Roberti Guiscardis Ducis Fratris Eius*, *RIS*, vol. 6; hereafter: Malaterra; the main secondary works on Malaterra are: E. Pontieri, *I Normanni nell'Italia meridionale*, Libreria scientifica editrice, Naples, 1964; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xxxvi-xxxvii; Wolf, *Making History*, pp. 143-71; Geoffrey Malaterra, *The Deeds of Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily and of his Brother Duke Robert Guiscard*, ed. and tr. K. B. Wolf, University of Michigan Press, Michigan 2005, pp. 1-33; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 17-20; Albu, *The Normans in their Histories*, pp. 106-44.

³⁵ Malaterra was in the secular clergy and sometime later in his life he became a Benedictine monk: Malaterra, p. 3; *The Deeds of Count Roger*, p. 41.

³⁶ Malaterra, p. 4; *The Deeds of Count Roger*, p. 42.

³⁷ Pontieri, *De Rebus Gestis*, p. iv. Compare with Wolf, *The Deeds of Count Roger*, pp. 6, 7, especially n. 6; and Taviani-Carozzi, who argues that Malaterra was almost certainly born in Normandy: *La terreur du monde*, p. 18.

1091. As Malaterra himself states, it was at Roger's specific request, that he began writing his *De rebus gestis Rogerii Calabriae et Siciliae comitis et Roberti Guiscardi ducis fratris eius*.

Malaterra's sources for his work, for he was not an eye-witness himself to the events he describes in his history, were primarily oral, gathered from people who had witnessed the events, although we cannot be sure whether he had access to any archival material.³⁸ But like William of Apulia, he does not identify any of his sources and we do not know whether they were knights, footsoldiers or other followers of the Norman army. There is a debate as to whether Malaterra had used the *Anonymi Vaticani historia Sicula* in his work, a history of the Norman conquests in southern Italy and Sicily up to 1091 written during the reign of Roger II, or whether these two sources for Robert Guiscard's and Roger's lives were written independently.³⁹ However, Malaterra would have been aware of the works of William of Jumièges or William of Poitiers, but it is not likely that he knew of William of Apulia's work, since the latter was writing between the years 1095-99, just a few years before Roger's death in 1101.

The person that dominates Malaterra's work is Count Roger of Calabria and Sicily. Malaterra regarded Roger as a generous patron to whom he could not refuse, when asked, to commemorate his deeds.⁴⁰ It is likely that Roger, very much aware that his life was about to end, being in his late sixties, commissioned Malaterra to write the history of the Norman conquests in Calabria and Sicily. One of the reasons was that he wanted his accomplishments to be transmitted for posterity, thus Malaterra's writing was in "plain and simple words" in an attempt to magnify and glorify the warlike ventures of Robert and Roger, presenting them as part of a divine plan.⁴¹ However, Roger certainly wished to strengthen the claims of his sons, Simon and Roger, against those of their cousin, the son of Robert Guiscard, Roger Borsa, to

³⁸ Malaterra, p. 3; *The Deeds of Count Roger*, p. 41.

³⁹ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. xxxvii-iii.

⁴⁰ Malaterra, p. 4; *The Deeds of Count Roger*, p. 42.

⁴¹ O. Capitani, "Specific Motivations and Continuing Themes in the Norman Chronicles of Southern Italy in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries", *The Normans in Sicily and Southern Italy*, Lincey Lectures 1974, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1977, p. 6.

the island of Sicily. But, beyond Malaterra's intention to immortalize the Count, he seems to have written his work with an eye of entertaining him and his companions.⁴² Given the fact that he was commissioned to write his work, Malaterra was certainly partial in his narrative and we can certainly note that he did conceal certain events which will be examined later on.

Leo Marsicanus, Romuald of Salerno and Lupus Protospatharius

Other primary sources for the eleventh century Norman infiltration include Leo Marsicanus and the continuators of his *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*.⁴³ This work entails the history of Montecassino from the sixth century up until 1072,⁴⁴ putting greater emphasis on the events of the eleventh century. It was authorised by Abbot Oderisius I (1088-1105) probably around 1098, and it must have been concluded by the time Leo was elected cardinal of Ostia by Pascal II in 1101. Leo's continuator was a certain Peter the Deacon who carried the narrative up to the year 1139.⁴⁵ Romuald, archbishop of Salerno for the years 1153-81 and a leading prelate of the Norman Kingdom of Sicily with political ambitions, is an important primary source for the eleventh century Normanno-Italian history. He has written numerous works, primarily of ecclesiastical interest, but his most important piece was his *Chronicon* from the creation of the world up to the year 1178.⁴⁶ This work is the first attempt in Italy since antiquity to write a universal history. Romuald's sources for the eleventh

⁴² *The Deeds of Count Roger*, p. 9.

⁴³ *Chronica monasterii Casinensis*, MGH, SS, vol. 34; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xxxiv-xxxv; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 6; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terre du monde*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 6; 1075 according to Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. xxxv.

⁴⁵ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xxxv-xxxvi; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terre du monde*, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Romualdus Salernitatis, *Chronicon*, RIS, vol. 7; D.J.A. Matthew, "The Chronicle of Romuald of Salerno", *The writing of history in the Middle Ages: essays presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R.H.C. Davis, J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, Clarendon, Oxford, 1981, 239-74; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xlix-lii.

century were Leo's *Chronica*, the *Annales Casinenses*⁴⁷ and a lost chronicle from Salerno that was also used from the author of the *Chronicon Amalfitanum*.⁴⁸ However, since he is not a contemporary of the events he describes that makes him a less reliable source. In addition, we need to mention Lupus Protospatharius' *Chronicon* that deals with the history of the Mezzogiorno between the years 805 and 1102.⁴⁹

Orderic Vitalis

Valuable information concerning Norman affairs in southern Italy and Sicily come from Orderic Vitalis, arguably one of the greatest chroniclers of his time. Born near Shrewsbury, in 1075, he was the son of a clerk, Ordclarius, who had accompanied Roger Montgomery, earl of Shrewsbury, from Normandy to England in the wake of the Conquest. Sent, at the age of ten to the abbey of St. Evroul in Normandy, he was to spend his entire life there, dying in or after 1141. The main body of Orderic's *Ecclesiastical History* was written between the years 1123-37 and it consists of thirteen books. In Book VII, which was written probably after 1130, Orderic examines the period from the dethronement of Nicephorus Botaneiates, in 1081, to the death of William the Conqueror in 1087. Although Orderic had used many written sources for his recapitulation of the events of William the Conqueror's reign, such as William of Poitiers and William of Jumièges, for the most events in Normandy, England and southern Italy in the years 1083-95 and in 1101-13 he relied mostly on oral sources, people that were coming to St. Evroul or those he had met on his travels,⁵⁰ and from his own

⁴⁷ *Annales Casinenses*, MGH, SS, vol. 19.

⁴⁸ "Chronicon Amalfitanum", *Amalfi im Fruhen Mittelalter*, ed. U. Schwarz, Tübingen, 1978, chapters 23-41, pp. 204-21.

⁴⁹ Lupus Protospatharius, *Annales*, MGH, SS, vol. 60; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. xxvii-xxviii; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, p. 23.

⁵⁰ *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis*, ed. M. Chibnall, (6 vols.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1969-80, vol. VI, p. xix.

memory.⁵¹ But the dependence on oral testimonies may have caused confusion on his recollection of dates and events. Certain events are put in the text in vague chronological terms,⁵² while certain times his dating is also wrong, even by many years. Orderic's use of military terms, like most of twelfth-century chroniclers, is also imprecise, for example his use of *acies* may mean a line or a column, while *pedites* applies to both foot-soldiers and dismounted knights. And in general, Orderic's battle-narratives become distorted by anecdotes from eye-witnesses which are thrown into the narrative of the events.⁵³

In the beginning of book VII, Orderic refers to the campaign against Byzantium in 1081. Before that, however, he briefly mentions the dethronement of Michael Doukas (1078) and Nicephorus Botaneiates (1081) and pseudo-Michael's appeal to Guiscard. But for the campaign itself, Orderic's narrative is very brief. For the four-month siege of Dyrrachium Orderic does not give anything but some brief comments of no particular importance, while for Alexius' army we only get a vague comment on its size and consistency.⁵⁴ Regarding the battle of Dyrrachium, Orderic only mentions its outcome, while following Guiscard's absence to Italy, our chronicler only vaguely refers to one of the battles at Ioannina (1082)⁵⁵ and he neglects – deliberately or not we do not know – to mention the Norman defeat at Larisa (1083) that caused Bohemond's retreat to Dyrrachium. Concerning Bohemond's invasion of 1107 in book XI, there is a list of the knights that joined Bohemond from England, France and elsewhere and their preparations before the crossing of the Adriatic.⁵⁶ However, for the actual siege of Dyrrachium and the Treaty of Devol (1108), Orderic does not give us anything but some very general information about the course of the siege.

⁵¹ Orderic Vitalis, vol. IV, pp. xx-xxii.

⁵² *Ibid.*, vol. IV, pp. xxiii-xxiv.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, vol. VI, pp. xxi-xxv.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, p. 19; from now on the latin number will be referring to the book of the *Ecclesiastical History* and not the volume, unless stated otherwise.

⁵⁵ No place or chronology are noted, but we presume that Orderic must refer to the battles of Ioannina in 1082: *Ibid.*, VII, pp. 28-9.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, XI, p. 71.

Orderic Vitalis is the main primary source that provides detailed information about members of great Norman families travelling to southern Italy, thus helping me establish the link between Normandy and the Norman infiltration in the south. Book III, which along with Book IV examine events in England, Normandy and parts of the history of St. Evroul, presents the internal history of several major Norman families in the first half of the eleventh century. We read about William of Giroie – originally from Brittany – who was to become a “scourge” of his enemies in Gaul, England and Apulia, while his grandson William III Giroie was known in Apulia as “the good Norman.”⁵⁷ Another son of the former, William of Montreuil,⁵⁸ is identified in the service of Richard I of Capua while Robert II Grandmesnil, a grandson of William I Giroie was exiled in Italy for three years in 1061, along with Ralph III Tosny, Hugh of Grandmesnil and Arnold Echauffour.⁵⁹ William Echauffour, another member of the Giroie family, after receiving his knighthood from Philip I of France he went to Apulia where he took a noble Lombard wife and won thirty castles in the name of Robert of Loritello, nephew of Robert Guiscard.⁶⁰ These are just a few examples of how helpful Orderic is in establishing the origin of a number of Italian immigrants, and along with Professor Ménager’s studies on French charter material of this period, we are able to piece together the puzzle of the Norman/French descent to Italy.

Anna Comnena

Anna Comnena, one of the most important and influential historiographers of the Byzantine literature, was the first-born child of the Emperor Alexius I Comnenus. She was born on the 1st December 1083 and at the very young age of eight she was betrothed to Constantinos Doukas, the son of the deposed Emperor Michael VII Doukas (1071-78). But

⁵⁷ Ibid., III, pp. 22, 26.

⁵⁸ Ibid., III, p. 98.

⁵⁹ Ibid., III, pp. 90, 106.

⁶⁰ Ibid., III, p. 126 .

Anna's hopes of gaining the Imperial throne were dashed by Constantine's death (sometime before 1097), and from then onwards we can clearly see the emerging hatred she had for her younger brother and heir to the throne, John. After an attempted rebellion with her mother Irene,⁶¹ following the death of her father Alexius in 1118, she was sent into a comfortable exile at the monastery of Theotokos Kecharitomenes until 1143, the year her brother died. It might seem possible that Anna started compiling her work after the death of her husband in 1137, but it seems more likely that she would have waited for her brother to pass away. Thus, the work was compiled within five years, since we understand that her fourteenth of the fifteen books was finished in 1148.⁶²

As a daughter of an emperor, she was in daily contact with many distinguished figures of the Byzantine Empire. She also acquired an education, and indeed a catholic one, that very few women had in that period.⁶³ As she writes in the preface of the *Alexiad*, she had "fortified her mind with the Quadrivium of Sciences", meaning geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music, while Rhetoric, Philosophy and Dialectic certainly filled her curriculum.⁶⁴ She had also studied Greek classical history⁶⁵ and she had some, although vague, knowledge of the geography of the Balkans and Asia Minor. Her interest in theology was general, but her religious beliefs were strictly orthodox and she despised, if not hated, all

⁶¹ J. Chrysostomides, "A Byzantine Historian: Anna Comnena", *Medieval Historical Writing in the Christian and Islamic Worlds*, ed. D.O. Morgan, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1982, 35.

⁶² "For thirty years now, I swear it by the souls of the most blessed Emperors, I have not seen, I have not spoken to a friend of my father". Since Anna was sent on exile in 1118, we presume that she means the year 1148. See: *Alexiad*, XIV. vii, vol. II, p. 291; Sewter, p. 461.

⁶³ G. Buckler, *Anna Comnena, a Study*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1968, pp. 178-87.

⁶⁴ *Annae Comnenae Alexiadis libri XV*, annotationes addidit Ludovicus Schopenus, E. Weber, Bonn, 1839-1878, "Praefatio", pp. 4-5; Sewter, p. 17.

⁶⁵ See cites the story of the deception of the Spartans by Themistocles at Salamina (480 BC). See: *Alexiad*, VI. X, pp. 310-11; Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, tr. E.R.A. Sewter, Penguin, London 2003, VI. x, p. 204; from hereafter: Sewter.

the non-Christians.⁶⁶ After the death of Constantinos Doukas, Anna was married to Nicephorus Bryennius, a man with great education and with passion for knowledge. Nicephorus had already started writing a work about Alexius' life, at the request of the Empress Irene, but his death in 1137 left it unfinished. However, the latter's work turned out to be a useful history of the Empire from the times of Isaac I Comnenus (1057-59) until the middle of Botaneiates' reign (1078-81), rather than a biography of Alexius, and Anna summarized it in the first two books of her *Alexiad*.⁶⁷

Anna's position in the Imperial Court brought her in daily contact with many leading figures of the Empire. Apart from her father and Emperor, she also had access to several other important officials like her uncle and governor of Dyrrachium George Paleologos, her husband and a trusted senior official Nicephorus Bryennius, her grand-mother and regent Anna Dalassena, Empress Irene, Taticius who was Alexius' representative to the Latin Armies of the First Crusade,⁶⁸ several ferry-men⁶⁹ of the Bosphorus who were carrying messages and news to and from the capital and a "Latin envoy sent by the Bishop of Bari to Robert Guiscard."⁷⁰ As she notes in her fourteenth book, "I have often heard the Emperor and George Paleologos discussing these matters in my presence."⁷¹ Further, she gathered useful information from eye-witnesses of the events she describes: "My material ... has been gathered ... from old soldiers who were serving in the army at the time of my father's accession, who fell on hard times and exchanged the turmoil of the outer world for the

⁶⁶ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, pp. 307-53; Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. xix.

⁶⁷ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, pp. 230-1.

⁶⁸ A very important source because when Taticius leaves the Latin camp to return to Constantinople, her narrative becomes less accurate.

⁶⁹ *Alexiad*, XIV. vii, vol. II, p. 291; Sewter, p. 460.

⁷⁰ For this Latin envoy named Jean, see: G.A. Loud, "Anna Komnena and her Sources for the Normans of Southern Italy", *Church and Chronicle in the Middle Ages, Essays Presented to John Taylor*, ed. I. Wood, G.A. Loud, Hambledon, London, 1991, 47.

⁷¹ *Alexiad*., XIV. vii, vol. II, p. 291; Sewter, p. 460.

peaceful life of monks.”⁷² Finally, she was an eye-witness herself in a number of events for “most of the time, moreover, we were ourselves present, for we accompanied our father and mother. Our lives by no means revolved round the home.”⁷³

There is an argument that Anna did not use her own memories for the events prior to 1097, the year in which she describes in full detail the camping of the crusaders at Constantinople, something that might explain the confusion in her tenth book.⁷⁴ For earlier events, we know that she took extracts verbatim from the *Chronographia* of Michael Psellus, and she may have read the works of Attaleiates, Skylitzes, Zonaras and Leo the Deacon.⁷⁵ It has also been argued by Mathieu that Anna also used William of Apulia’s *Gesta* as a source, and because she did not speak Latin it is very likely that she used a translator. For three episodes regarding Guiscard’s siege of Dyrrachium, Anna uses brief passages of the *Gesta* nearly verbatim, and though their similarities are limited and brief this strongly suggests that Anna had somehow obtained William’s work.⁷⁶ However, this argument has been strongly criticised by Loud who believes that it would have been impossible for Anna to have had access to a rare manuscript such as the *Gesta* and simply points out to a well-informed common source, probably Nicephoros Bryennius whose instrumental role in drawing the Treaty of Devol will be seen in the following chapters.⁷⁷

Other sources for the *Alexiad* include four main categories of documents. First we have the “memoirs” written by war veterans who had become monks, and which works were compiled probably at the request of the Emperor himself.⁷⁸ Second, judging by the quotations

⁷² *Alexiad.*, XIV. vii, vol. II, pp. 292-3; Sewter, p. 461; see also: XIV. vii, vol. II, p. 290; Sewter, p. 459.

⁷³ *Alexiad*, XIV. vii, vol. II, p. 290; Sewter, p. 459.

⁷⁴ Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. xi.

⁷⁵ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, p. 231.

⁷⁶ Mathieu, *Gesta*, pp. 38-46.

⁷⁷ Loud, “Anna Komnena”, 50-52; for Nicephoros Bryennios, Loud bases his argument on an unpublished lecture by J. Howard-Johnston. See: *Ibid.*, 52, n. 50.

⁷⁸ *Alexiad.*, XIV. vii, vol. II, pp. 292-3; Sewter, p. 461; see also: Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. xii.

that we have in her work of a chrysobull⁷⁹ appointing Anna Dalassena as Regent,⁸⁰ a letter to Henry IV of Germany,⁸¹ the correspondence between the Emperor, John Comnenus and the habitants of Dyrrachium in 1091,⁸² and many other letters,⁸³ we may assume that she had direct access to the state archives in Constantinople. Further, Anna must have used the diplomatic correspondence between her father, or other high-ranking officials, and foreign leaders, including the period of Guiscard's Illyrian campaign, the passing of the crusaders from Constantinople and letters written to the Seljuc chieftain Tutush and the Sultan Kilij Arslan.⁸⁴ Finally, she certainly had access to the documents of important treaties, like the Treaty of Devol (1108) which is the longest diplomatic document cited by Anna,⁸⁵ along with Alexius' chrysobull to the Venetians (1082).⁸⁶

However, in many places in manuscript of the *Alexiad* there are *lacunae* where Anna Comnena omits to tell us of a certain date, place or a name, either because her memory simply failed her or perhaps because she did not want to go into further details for various reasons (i.e. personal sympathies). One such relevant example can be found in Book V where Anna includes Bohemond's campaign in Thessaly (1082-3). When describing the Byzantine army's course towards Larissa to meet up with the Normans, Alexius "made his way to another small place commonly called Plabitzza, situated near the River [...]"⁸⁷ What we also need to mention, albeit briefly, is the inconsistencies between different parts of Anna's work, which leads us to the conclusion that she probably did not compile the books of the *Alexiad*

⁷⁹ This was the official order by the Emperor which was written down in a parchment and then folded and sealed by the official secretary who was responsible for the Emperor's seal.

⁸⁰ *Alexiad*, III. vi, pp. 157-8; Sewter, p. 116 .

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, III. x, pp. 174-7; Sewter, p. 126.

⁸² *Ibid.*, VIII. vii, pp. 413-4; Sewter, p. 262.

⁸³ Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. xii-xiii.

⁸⁴ *Alexiad*, I. ii, pp. 16-7; Sewter, pp. 33-4; see also: IX. iii, p. 434; Sewter, pp. 274-5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII. xii, vol. II, pp. 228-46; Sewter, p. 424.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, IV. ii, pp. 191-2; Sewter, p. 137.

⁸⁷ *Alexiad*, V. v, p. 245; Sewter, pp. 167-8

in their chronological order.⁸⁸ For example, the city of Dyrrachium with its fortifications are first mentioned by Anna at the end of Book III,⁸⁹ but the most detailed description can be found in Book XIII when she writes about Bohemond's siege of 1107-8.⁹⁰

Anna Comnena had, of course, her prejudices, racial, social and personal, but that does not mean that she was necessarily trying to deceive her audience. Throughout her history her love, affection and admiration for her father and his achievements is unquestionable.⁹¹ But with the ancient Greek historiographers, and especially Thucydides,⁹² being her model, her stated objective certainly was to tell the truth and nothing else. Anna displays her remarkable concern for impartiality in history when, writing about the oral testimonies she had gathered, she noted: "Most of the evidence I collected myself, especially in the reign of the third Emperor after Alexius [Manuel I, 1143-80], at a time when all flattery and lies had disappeared with his grandfather."⁹³ And as she remarked in the preface of the *Alexiad*, "whenever one assumes the role of a historian, friendship and enmities have to be forgotten. ... The historian, therefore, must shirk neither remonstrance with his friends, or praise of his enemies. For my part I hope to satisfy both parties, both those who are offended by us and those who accept us, by appealing to the evidence of the actual events and of eye-witnesses."⁹⁴

Attaleiates, Psellus, Skylitzes and Zonaras

⁸⁸ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, pp. 253-6.

⁸⁹ *Alexiad*, III. xii, p. 185; Sewter, p. 133 .

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII. iii, vol. II, p. 190; Sewter, p. 403.

⁹¹ For example: *Ibid.*, XV. iii, vol. II, pp. 344-5; Sewter, p. 478.

⁹² Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, p. 205; Chrysostomides, "Anna Comnena", 33.

⁹³ *Alexiad.*, XIV. vii, vol. II, pp. 291-2; Sewter, p. 460.

⁹⁴ *Alexiad*, "Praefatio", pp. 3-4; Sewter, p. 18.

Michael Attaleiates⁹⁵ was a senator and a judge who held the high Court title of *proedros* and supported the party of the provincial aristocracy, born between 1020-30 and died sometime after 1085. His most significant and influential work was his *History*⁹⁶ which examines the period 1034-79/80, based primarily on first hand observations and oral testimonies from the protagonists of the events. His work is not as personal as Psellus' *Chronographia* but it is, indeed, considered as a rhetoric panegyric of the old Emperor Nicephoros III Botaneiates, which make him less impartial for that period that a modern researcher would wish. Moving on to another important primary source of the eleventh century, the *Chronographia*⁹⁷ of Michael Psellus examines the years 976-1078 structured around the reign of the Emperors. Psellus was one of the greatest intellectual figures in the eleventh century Byzantine Court, a writer, poet, philosopher, and statesman with a career in the civil administration, he was born in the capital in 1018 and died sometime after 1081. One of the senior officials in Constantine IX's (1042-55) government, he resigned only to return to the capital after 1059 as the "senior philosopher" (*ypatos ton philosophon*). His work was compiled in two parts, with the second section that deals with the period 1059-78 being written at the request of Michael VII (1071-78), thus being a panegyric of these three Emperors. Although the *Chronographia* has some serious deficiencies, like the lack of dates, names, place names and, generally, Psellus' vague geography, it is generally agreed that the work hold a very high place in the catalogue of medieval histories, being compiled by an educated man who not only recorded history but also helped make history.

John Skylitzes' life is rather obscure but we know he lived in the second half of the eleventh century and he held the titles of *kouropalates* and *drungarie* of the Watch.⁹⁸ His

⁹⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, p. 229.

⁹⁶ Michaelis Attaliothae, *Historia*, *CShB*, vol. 47, ed. I. Bekker, E. Weber, Bonn, 1853.

⁹⁷ Michael Psellus, *Fourteen Byzantine Rulers*, tr. E.R.A. Sewter, Penguin, London, 1966;
Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, vol. III, p. 1754-55.

⁹⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. III, p. 1914.

*Synopsis Historiarum*⁹⁹ encompasses the period between 811-1057 and he is conceived as the continuator of Theophanes the Confessor¹⁰⁰. Skylitzes uses a variety of sources and sometimes presents contradictory conclusions, while the sections also differ stylistically as well. The major hero of the last part of Skylitzes is Catacalon Cecaumenos, and we may think that he must have been close to that senior general writing his *Στρατηγικόν* between 1075-78. Skylitzes' material is organised according to Imperial reigns and, as the work relies on sources – apart from Psellus – which have not survived, it is of the greatest value for the history of the eleventh century. His work was taken up to the year 1078 by an unknown writer who might have used the *History* of Attaleiates. Another valuable work is John Zonaras' *Epitome Historiarum*,¹⁰¹ a chronicle going from the Creation to the year 1118 (Alexius Comnenus' death) and written by the commander of the Imperial bodyguard (*drugarios tes viglas*) in Alexius' Court sometime in the middle of the twelfth century – after having become a monk. But Zonaras largely copies Skylitzes, Attaleiates and Psellus and his material is used in a somewhat mechanical, often superficial manner with occasional errors. He criticized Alexius Comnenus' governance and monetary policy and his work is a polemic against Anna Comnena's eulogy of her father.

Writing Medieval Military History: the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Principal Narrative

Sources Compared

The aim of the present section is to examine Anna Comnena, Geoffrey Malaterra and William of Apulia as military historians, and will attempt to assess the accuracy of their description of battles and sieges. Some of the major questions that will be raised are: to what

⁹⁹ Ioannes Skylitzes, Georgius Cedrenus, *Synopsis Historiarum*, *CSHB*, vols. 34, 35, ed. I. Bekker, E. Weber, Bonn, 1838-39.

¹⁰⁰ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, *CSHB*, vols. 38, 39, ed. I. Bekker, E. Weber, Bonn, 1839-41.

¹⁰¹ Ioannis Zonaras, *Annales*, *CSHB*, vols. 41, 42.1, 42.2, E. Weber, Bonn, 1841-97; *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. III, p. 2229; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 211-12.

extent are the figures they provide for army size, reliable, both in absolute numbers and in the ratios given between cavalry and infantry? What is our chroniclers' knowledge of the local geography where the military operations took place, and to what extent – if at all – were they familiar with the terrain of the battles or sieges, or the campaign routes of armies which they describe? How accurate or detailed are their description of castles and fortifications? Another major point is the extent to which these chroniclers provide dating of major military events, and how far do their narratives permit the accurate reconstruction of a chain of events? Amatus of Montecassino has been consciously omitted because, even though his account is most valuable for the earlier period of the Norman infiltration in Italy, the *History of the Normans* concludes in the year 1078 and, thus, does not deal with the main events of my research which is the Norman invasions of Illyria.

In his introductory chapter to *Art of Warfare*,¹⁰² the eminent medieval military historian J. F. Verbruggen analyses both the limitations and general value of several medieval sources like clerical and secular accounts. Since my research includes a court layman (William of Apulia), monks (Malaterra, Amatus and Orderic) and a well-educated princess (Anna Comnena), a brief presentation of the aforementioned limitations has to be made at this point. In many cases several of the clerical sources give a narrative of battles, sieges or entire campaigns which is incomplete, “in order not to bore the reader” simply because reporting these events in a form of today's war-correspondent was not their objective. It is undoubtedly an over-simplification to say that all clerics were ignorant of military affairs; Orderic Vitalis, for example, is one of the foremost sources for Anglo-Norman military history, and much of his information came from contact with people who had seen active service. Nevertheless, many ecclesiastical chroniclers show little interest in recording details such as tactics and weaponry, or to report in detail what really took place in the battlefield; their accounts of battle are influenced by invention or borrowed from classical models, particularly in their

¹⁰² J.F. Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare in Western Europe During the Middle Ages, From the Eighth Century to 1340*, tr. S. Willard, R.W. Southern, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1997, pp. 10-18.

terminology, while they tend to ascribe a victory to a miracle or God's intervention. Secular sources are, generally, more reliable in their accounts, especially when the person was an eye-witness of the events he or she describes, even though they have the tendency to glorify their heroes or certain groups of people depending on their sympathies. And when these sources were written in the vernacular they are extremely valuable as they provide a clear and distinct terminology. However, the fact that some of them might not have been experienced in military affairs also bears the risk of mistaken or inaccurate report of events.¹⁰³

This chapter, however, fits in the more general question about the dangers in using chronicle material by modern military historians. This topic was first raised by Verbruggen in the mid-1950s and has been picked up since by John Keegan and, among others, Kelly DeVries.¹⁰⁴ In his introductory chapter "Weaknesses of Modern Military Historians in Discussing Medieval Warfare", Verbruggen criticized some of the so-called old school of military historians – H. Delpech and the Prussian general Kohler – in producing works that lack the critical faculty which is indispensable to a study of the art of medieval warfare, in contrast to other historians like Charles Oman and Hans Delbruck. His main argument is that it is absolutely necessary to check the military value of each chronicler's account, because even the best narratives may include inventions and legends which can be spotted solely through the comparison of many sources. According to his critique, Delpech and Kohler – who were experienced army officers but not professional historians – accepted all estimates of the numbers of troops and battle tactics used at their face value without "filtering" their enormous amount of data, with their lack of historical criticism leading to their work being discredited by modern historians.

To return to the main topic of my discussion, the question of numbers can be a tough one indeed; even in modern warfare, it can be difficult for a general to be fully aware of the

¹⁰³ Although this argument is dismissed by: Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 16-18.

¹⁰⁴ J. Keegan, *The Face of Battle, A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and the Somme*, Pimlico, London, 2004 (first published in 1976), pp. 27-36; K. DeVries, "The Use of Chroniclers in Recreating Medieval Military History", *Journal of Medieval Military History*, 2 (2004), 1-17.

discrepancy between nominal troop numbers and actual combat effective men. Such difficulties would have been much more acute for a medieval commander. In large-scale expeditions like Hastings, Dyrrachium or Matzikert, the commanding general would only have known the leaders of main contingents, along with a rough estimate of their size. Thus, for contemporary chroniclers who report the size of an army or opposing armies in a battlefield, we cannot expect them to provide us with accurate or detailed information for a number of reasons. Their estimates were affected by the inherent tendency of such narratives to exaggerate; by bias towards friend or foes; and, unless the chronicler had taken part in an expedition, the reliance on oral testimony from eye-witnesses which always bears the great risk of miscalculation or inflation. Other reasons may include the time when a chronicler might be writing his account, like Anna Comnena's compilation of the *Alexiad* many decades after the events had taken place. Finally, there is always the case when a number of knights might have dismounted or lost their horses for several reasons (battle casualties, fatigue, disease), thus counted as infantry by inexperienced chroniclers in military affairs.¹⁰⁵

For the Norman campaigns of 1081 and 1084, we are more dependent on Latin sources for numbers of Robert Guiscard's forces, while unsurprisingly Anna Comnena appears far better informed about the consistency and size of her father's armies. Thus, Anna reports that the Norman army in 1081 comprised of 30,000 men which was carried across the Adriatic in 150 ships of various sizes with – a rare detail – 200 men in each ship,¹⁰⁶ a clear exaggeration in an attempt to magnify her father's victory over the Normans. However, the *Alexiad's* details of the consistency of the 1081 and 1107 Byzantine armies are extremely valuable since the author includes the names of all the senior Byzantine officers along with the consistency of the armies. She does not, however, provide an estimate of their numbers, with the exception

¹⁰⁵ For all of these difficulties in reporting the figures of armies in the Middle Ages see: Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 5-9; J. France, *Victory in the East, A Military History of the First Crusade*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 122-42; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 99-106.

¹⁰⁶ *Alexiad*, I. xvi, pp. 74-5; Sewter, p. 69.

of the 2,800 Manichaeans and the Turkish force sent by Sulleyman I.¹⁰⁷ Further, she reports that 13,000 men – a rather implausible figure – were drowned after the Normanno-Venetian naval battle in the Corfiot waters in autumn 1084.¹⁰⁸ For the Norman host, however, Anna only uses numerous adjectives like *countless*, *innumerable* and others, although she does provide us with a figure on the losses that the Normans suffered in 1085 due to an outbreak of malaria, giving the excessive figure of 10,000 dead men of which 500 were knights.¹⁰⁹ It would thus appear that the numbers given by Anna, although rare are mostly unreliable, mainly because the author is writing many decades after the events.

It is not surprising that William of Apulia should be much better informed about Robert Guiscard's expeditions than Malaterra. We know that Guiscard's main army was transported in 1081 in "fifty liburnes",¹¹⁰ with William being our only source for the participation of the Dalmatians in this expedition.¹¹¹ However, the composition of the fleet and the army is not given by the author, who is also silent about the casualties inflicted on the Norman fleet by a storm before its arrival at Dyrrachium. For the Byzantine army, William is obviously less well informed than Anna, writing about a "grand army" with "different nationalities" both "Greek and Barbarians",¹¹² while he is also unaware of the size of the Venetian fleet in 1081. Regarding Guiscard's second Illyrian campaign, William notes that the size of the Norman fleet was 120 ships.¹¹³ Further, at the point where he refers to the casualties due to the severe cold in the Norman camp in the winter of 1084-5, he assessed the casualties to be five hundred knights in less than three months,¹¹⁴ the same figure been given by Anna Comnena

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., IV. iv, pp. 198-9; Sewter, p. 141; XIII. v-viii, vol. II, pp. 199-217; Sewter, pp. 408-13; V. v, p. 244; Sewter, p. 167.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., VI. v, p. 285; Sewter, p. 190.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., IV. iii, p. 196; Sewter, pp. 139-40.

¹¹⁰ *Gesta*, IV. 200, p. 214

¹¹¹ Ibid., IV. 134, p. 210.

¹¹² *Gesta*, IV. 322-324, p. 222.

¹¹³ Ibid., V. 143, p. 244.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., V. 215-219, p. 248.

as well. Finally, for this campaign we are also informed that Roger Borsa, along with Robert II, took part in it while the only son of Robert Guiscard who is not mentioned at all by William is Guy, who did take part as Anna Comnena informs us.¹¹⁵

Malaterra's focus of his work is Roger Hauteville's conquest of Sicily, with Apulia and Illyria being but a mere sideshow in his narrative. Thus, we only gain some rough estimates of opposing armies from Malaterra's narrative, although some useful exceptions have to do with the 1081 invasion army which consisted of 1,300 knights,¹¹⁶ a rather reasonable size for a cavalry force. Also, during the siege of Kastoria by Guiscard's forces in the spring 1082, we are told that the numbers of the defenders included 300 Varangians.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, for the crucial events of this period like the sieges and battles of Dyrrachium and Larissa, Malaterra is silent when it comes to numbers. For example, he writes about the Byzantine forces mustered in October 1081: "The Emperor alerted the entire empire ... and mobilised a large army ... and thousands of soldiers."¹¹⁸ The Byzantine army was, indeed, larger than the Normans but these comments were probably made intentionally to make Robert Guiscard's victory sound even greater to the ears of his patron, Roger Hauteville.

Even though all of our main sources let us down when it comes to giving accurate figures about the opposing armies, fortunately for modern historians other Latin chroniclers writing about this period seem much better informed and perhaps more reliable. For example, we should compare Malaterra's 1,300 knights for the 1081 campaign with the 700 horse given by Romuald of Salerno, although we must remember that Romuald was writing in the second half of the twelfth century.¹¹⁹ For Bohemond's army for the invasion of 1107-8, none of our main sources give any estimate of their numbers and we have to rely solely on other

¹¹⁵ Ibid., V. 144, 151, p. 244; *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 282; Sewter, pp. 188-9.

¹¹⁶ Malaterra, 3. 24.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 3. 29.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 3. 26, 27.

¹¹⁹ Romuald of Salerno, s.a. 1081.

contemporary sources like the Anonymous of Bari, Fulcher of Chartres, Albert of Aachen and, although not a contemporary, William of Tyre.¹²⁰

Another crucial point is the geographical knowledge of our chroniclers and their degree of familiarity with the area where the events they describe take place. Is their presentation of the battlefields and campsites detailed and accurate enough to track the route of each army? If we begin our analysis with the Latin sources, it is evident that both William of Apulia and Geoffrey Malaterra are not aware of the geography of Illyria and Epirus and rely on information passed on to them by eyewitnesses when it comes to place names, rivers, plains and, most importantly, the surrounding areas of Dyrrachium and Larissa. Starting with William of Apulia, although in many cases he does mention certain locations, there is no detailed description of the surrounding areas and in some cases we are unable to identify these particular places on a modern map or follow the route of an army. For Guiscard's crossing of the Adriatic, he does mention that Otranto was the gathering point for the embarkation of his army,¹²¹ but William is silent concerning the disembarkation point on the Illyrian coast. Before the siege of Dyrrachium, William informs us about the preparatory conquests in the Illyrian and Epirotic coastline, meaning the cities of Avlona along with "certain others by the coast",¹²² while before that, Bohemond is mentioned as having taken Corfu, Butrinto and Vonitsa.¹²³ Further, there is no description of the city or of the surrounding areas of Dyrrachium, and the precise location of Guiscard's camp is probably the

¹²⁰ *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1107; Fulcherius Carnotensis, *Historia Hierosolymitana*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer, Heidelberg, 1913, p. 521; Albert of Aachen, *Historia Ierosolimitana, History of the Journey to Jerusalem*, ed. and tr. by S. B. Edgington, Clarendon, Oxford, 2007, X. 40, p. 754; William of Tyre, *A History of the Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, tr. and ed. by E. Atwater Babcock and A.C.Krey, Octagon, New York, 1976, XI. 6, p. 471.

¹²¹ *Gesta*, IV. 133, p. 210.

¹²² *Ibid.*, IV. 232-233, p. 216.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, IV. 201-207, p. 214.

one given by William in book V where he describes the starvation of many Normans at their camp near the River Glykys.¹²⁴

Crossing over to the Byzantines, from the amount of information we get from the *Gesta* it is impossible to track down the route of Alexius' army from Constantinople to Dyrrachium or to identify the place where he pitched his camp. For the entire period of 1082-84, the only details we get from the *Gesta* are the mentioning of the places where the three battles took place, the cities of Ioannina, Larissa and Kastoria.¹²⁵ Regarding Guiscard's second invasion, we are informed that the latter embarked his army at Taranto and sailed for Greece from the port of Brindisi,¹²⁶ while the two Norman armies are joined "at the junction which was held by the other sons of the illustrious duke,"¹²⁷ meaning the port of Butrinto.

The *De Rebus* gives us even less details than the *Gesta*, like the port of Hiericho where the Norman fleet reached shore,¹²⁸ and that they moved their ships at a place where the Vjossa River flows to the sea.¹²⁹ But no more information is given about the area around the city of Dyrrachium or about the nature of the battle-ground, even though we do know that Alexius set up his camp at a distance of *four stadia*¹³⁰ away from the Normans. Malaterra is also vague regarding the preparatory conquests before the major siege operations. After the battle of Dyrrachium, he writes that: "Various fortresses in the same province were unable to withstand the threat that the duke posed,"¹³¹ but he fails to be more specific. And we can spot exactly the same vagueness when he describes the Norman siege of Kastoria.¹³² Finally,

¹²⁴ Ibid., V. 210, p. 246.

¹²⁵ Ibid., V. 6, 26, 76, pp. 236, 240.

¹²⁶ Ibid., V. 132, p. 242.

¹²⁷ Ibid., V. 150-151, p. 244.

¹²⁸ The precise place is unclear.

¹²⁹ Malaterra, 3. 24.

¹³⁰ Pliny the Elder, in his *Natural History* 2.85, wrote: "A stadium corresponds to 125 of our paces, that is, 625 feet".

¹³¹ Malaterra, 3. 27.

¹³² Ibid., 3. 29.

when Malaterra's narrative goes on to Bohemond's campaigns in the Greek mainland, his brief chapter only deals with the battle outside Arta.

Anna Comnena's knowledge of the topography of the Balkans is another weak point in her work. More specifically, valuable information is given about the point of embarkation and disembarkation of Guiscard's army in 1081,¹³³ while for Bohemond's invasion in 1107 we are told that these were Bari and Avlona respectively.¹³⁴ For the area of Dyrrachium, however, Anna's description is vague and wholly insufficient. She does mention some of the rivers, like Glykys where the Normans pitched their camp, or Charzanes where the Byzantines later pitched theirs, and she even mentions the name of the church of St Nicholas where the Varangians sought shelter after their retreat from the battle. But in her thirteenth book Anna becomes more accurate concerning the land-blockade of the Norman army in 1107/8 – perhaps because she wrote that part of her work first. She identifies certain mountain passes (Petra), rivers (Charzanes, Diavolis, Bouse) or insignificant places where the Imperial army spent the night (Mylos).¹³⁵ But all of the above would probably have been random eyewitness information rather than personal knowledge of the area. The only detailed description of the Dyrrachium area can be found in her twelfth book during Bohemond's siege of the city in 1107/8.¹³⁶ As for Alexius' course from Constantinople to Dyrrachium in 1081, we know next to nothing of the exact route that he followed, apart from his stop at Thessaloniki at an unknown date. It is very likely that the Emperor would have followed the same route again in 1108 to face Bohemond, thus Anna's list of the stops the Emperor made during his march: Geranion, Chirovachi, Mestos, Psyslos (in the River Evros) and Thessaloniki where he spent the winter.¹³⁷

¹³³ *Alexiad*, III. xii, p. 183; Sewter, p. 133.

¹³⁴ Even though Anna erroneously reports Bari and it was, indeed, Brindisi the port of embarkation. *Ibid.*, XII. ix, vol. II, pp. 218-19; Sewter, p. 392.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII. v-viii, vol. II, pp. 199-217; Sewter, pp. 408-418.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, XII. ix, vol. II, pp. 172-73; Sewter, p. 393.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII. i, vol. II, pp. 177-78; Sewter, pp. 395-6.

For the period 1082-83, Anna once more avoids giving us any specific details of the Emperor's route until he reached Ioannina. There is also no description of the area around the city, especially where the double battle was fought, and after the defeat of the Byzantines Anna has Bohemond in her account marching and countermarching over the Balkans in the most bewildering fashion.¹³⁸ For the actual siege of the city of Larissa and the battle that was fought between the two armies close to the city, there is only a description of the place where Alexius chose to encamp his army,¹³⁹ while a few place names do appear later on Anna's narrative which, however, do not really help us construct a full and comprehensive image of what really happened that day. For Guiscard's second campaign in 1084 the information that we have are more scarce and we only know about the places of embarkation (Otranto) and disembarkation (Avlona), the places of the triple naval battle with the Venetians (Cassiopi and Kerkyra), the place of Guiscard's death and the port where the rest of Guiscard's fleet had anchored after the battle (Vonitsa).

Another striking drawback of our Latin chroniclers' accounts is the lack of dates. Starting with the *Gesta*, no indication of dates is given in any of his books, and even certain references to seasons are also very rare. Even though William of Apulia records the events in his story in relatively good chronological order, we need to confirm what he is writing with the accounts of Geoffrey Malaterra, Amatus of Montecassino or Anna Comnena and other contemporary chroniclers. For example, we know that the shipwreck of Guiscard's fleet, in 1081, happened "*in the summer.*"¹⁴⁰ Of which year, however, William does not mention and we have to read the *Alexiad* to confirm that it took place in June 1081. Further, William tells us about the "occupation" of the city of Dyrrachium by the Venetians (1083) sometime during the winter and that they stayed there for fifteen days.¹⁴¹ For the second Illyrian

¹³⁸ Ibid., V. v, pp. 242-43; Sewter, pp. 166-7 .

¹³⁹ Ibid., V. v, pp. 244-45; Sewter, pp 167-8.

¹⁴⁰ *Gesta*, IV. 218, p. 216.

¹⁴¹ William means the winter of 1083-84, see: Ibid., V. 96, p. 240; idem, V. 84, p. 240.

campaign, the only dates given in Book V are the amount of time the Normans spent at the Illyrian coast, right after their arrival.¹⁴²

Turning to Malaterra's history, although his narrative generally follows a good chronological order, in his third book that focuses on Guiscard's Illyrian campaigns he gives only two specific dates. Thus, Guiscard reached Otranto in May 1081,¹⁴³ but Malaterra does not give any more details concerning the actual siege of Dyrrachium. However, before the surrender of the city to the Normans, we are informed that Alexius arrived at Dyrrachium with his army in October 1081,¹⁴⁴ but no more details are given about the day of the battle. For the following period of Guiscard's departure to Italy and Bohemond's whereabouts in the Greek mainland, Malaterra is surprisingly vague and brief and our efforts to reconstruct the events lay mostly on the rest of the historians of this period.

Before we examine Anna Comnena's lack of sufficient dating in her *Alexiad*, we need to remember two points which I have already mentioned. That she was writing in the 1140s, thus several decades after the events had taken place and being an elderly woman in her sixties, things that would have certainly affected her recollection of the events. Second, the different sections of her work were not composed in their chronological order, something which inevitably leads to confusion and inconsistencies. Regarding my period of research, Anna writes that the first siege of Dyrrachium began on the 17th June,¹⁴⁵ and that the Normans were already encamped at Glabinitza for seven days to recover from their shipwreck, so we can trace their arrival at the Greek coast around the 10th.¹⁴⁶ As for Alexius' departure from the capital, we only know that Pakourianus was despatched to Dyrrachium in

¹⁴² All the units, except from the cavalry, stayed for the winter at the camp near the River Glykys until the spring of 1085, see: *Ibid.*, V. 207, p. 246.

¹⁴³ Malaterra, 3. 24.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3. 27.

¹⁴⁵ *Alexiad*, IV. i, p. 187; Sewter, p. 135; see the interesting but unconvincing argument by Buckler that the battle of Dyrrachium took place in 1082 and not in 1081: Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, pp. 406-14.

¹⁴⁶ *Alexiad*, III. xii, p. 185; Sewter, p. 133.

August along with an unknown number of men.¹⁴⁷ But since the Emperor did not leave for Dyrrachium “until the disposition of the troops was complete”, and bearing in mind that Alexius was reconnoitring the ground around Dyrrachium on the 15th October,¹⁴⁸ he should have left Constantinople around the end of August. Anna Comnena also notes that the battle of Dyrrachium took place on the 18th October,¹⁴⁹ but the dating of the city’s surrender is unknown and we can only presume from Anna’s words that it must have occurred some weeks after the Byzantine defeat, certainly sometime in the early winter.

For the following two years period, Anna’s chronology is surprisingly weak and the only dates that she gives us are two. After Bohemond had established his headquarters at Ioannina in spring 1082, Alexius left Constantinople with his troops to face him in the month of May of that year.¹⁵⁰ The next date Anna gives us has to do with Bohemond’s arrival at Larissa and the beginning of the siege in full force – in November 1082 as I will prove later.¹⁵¹ Considering that the governor of Larissa, Leo Cephalas, dispatched an urgent letter to Alexius six months after the start of the siege (April, 1083), and that shortly after the Emperor’s army was on the move to Larissa, we assume that Alexius must have arrived at the besieged city in May 1083.¹⁵² For the rest of the period until Guiscard’s death at Cephalonia our only sources of dates are the Latin ones.

Our observations on Anna Comnena’s narrative so far apply equally to Bohemond’s invasion. Between 1105, when the Emperor was notified about Bohemond’s plans to invade Illyria, and the actual invasion two years later, we only get three indications of a date which have to do with Alexius’ defensive measures. So, the Emperor arrived at Thessaloniki in

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IV. iv, p. 198; Sewter, p. 140.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, IV. v, p. 203; Sewter, p. 143.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, IV. vi, p. 208; Sewter, p. 146.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, V. iv, p. 237; Sewter, p. 163.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, V. v, p. 244; Sewter, p. 167.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, V. v, pp. 245-46; Sewter, p. 167.

September 1105¹⁵³ to spend the winter in the Macedonian capital, because we find him there in the beginning of spring (March, 1106).¹⁵⁴ The second date has to do with the Emperor's attendance at a ceremony in Thessaloniki, in honour of the patron of the city St. Demetrius, on the 25th January 1107. Unfortunately, for the crucial period between Bohemond's invasion and the Treaty of Devol, we are only informed about Alexius' departure from the capital on the 1st November 1107.¹⁵⁵

Anna's accounts of the battles fought are not considered to be her best parts of the *Alexiad*. However, her descriptions "though not the finest specimens of her art, are often lucid, instructive, and even interesting."¹⁵⁶ The first battles that are examined by Anna are those between the Norman and the Venetian fleets off the coasts of Dyrrachium, in June 1081. No number for the Venetian ships is given, although Anna notes that it "comprised all types of ships."¹⁵⁷ The Norman fleet had 150 ships of all types, but we are not informed whether several units returned home after the disembarkation of the Norman army, or if they all remained at Dyrrachium. Anna tells us, however, that the Norman fleet was very well protected by "every sort of war machines", probably because they anticipated a confrontation with the Venetians. As for the description of the naval battle itself, unfortunately Anna does not give any details about the naval tactics employed or the chain of the events that led to Bohemond's retreat.

The Normanno-Venetian naval battle off Dyrrachium is also described in detail by Malaterra who gives a rather different version of the events. In the *De Rebus* there is a vivid description of the events of the first and second day, including the preparation of the Venetian ships for the battle, a reference to the morale of the two armies and the deception of the

¹⁵³ It should read "the twenty-fourth" and not "the twentieth" year of Alexius' accession to the throne: *Ibid.*, XII. iii, vol. II, p. 141; Sewter, p. 374.

¹⁵⁴ A comet appeared in the sky, "foretelling" the coming of the Normans, in February-March 1106: *Ibid.*, XII. iv, vol. II, pp. 146-47; Sewter, p. 378.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII. i, vol. II, p. 177; Sewter, p. 395.

¹⁵⁶ Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, p. 417.

¹⁵⁷ *Alexiad*, IV. ii, p. 192; Sewter, p. 137.

Normans.¹⁵⁸ Also, Malaterra notes the use of Greek Fire during the naval combat.¹⁵⁹ Although William of Apulia talks about the Venetian-Byzantine alliance, he does not go into more detail and he gives the misleading impression of Venice being a satellite state of Byzantium.¹⁶⁰ After mentioning the reason why Alexius called for the Venetians – to enforce a naval blockade,¹⁶¹ William also highlights the Venetian dominance in the Adriatic Sea.¹⁶² However, for the actual naval battle, no number of the opposing fleets is given and the description of the three-day battle is too short and vague. Only the deception of the Normans by the Venetians is mentioned, along with the participation of the Dalmatians in Guiscard's fleet.¹⁶³

The two of the most important land battles of this period, however, were the ones close to Dyrrachium and Larissa. Anna Comnena notes the exact date of the battle of Dyrrachium, 18th October 1081, but again no numbers of the opposing armies are given apart from estimations of their size and composition. Surprisingly though, Anna takes us to her father's war council the day before the battle where the battle-plan is finalised.¹⁶⁴ Her narrative for the day of the battle is relatively detailed as to have an idea of the battle-lines drawn by first light and how the actual battle unfolded. Regarding the battle-lines, we know the senior officers of the opposing armies and where exactly they were stationed, but for the Normans we are unaware of the composition of each unit. Although the *Alexiad* is not so detailed concerning the battle formations, the crucial tactical moves that decided the outcome of the battle are noted, like the attack of the Norman wing commanded by Amiketas which was

¹⁵⁸ Malaterra, 3. 26.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3. 26.

¹⁶⁰ *Gesta*, IV. 278-282, p. 218.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, IV. 286-290, p. 220.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, IV. 280, p. 218.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, IV. 300-311, p. 220.

¹⁶⁴ *Alexiad*, IV. v, pp. 204-7; Sewter, pp. 145-6.

repulsed by the Varangians, and the latter's ill-thought advance far beyond the Byzantine line of attack and their retreat after they were attacked by a Norman infantry detachment.¹⁶⁵

The *Gesta* is no better informed about the events on the 18th October than Anna, so we only get the basic outline of the events of the day. William's description lacks certain important details, like names and units, along with the description of battle tactics employed by the opposing armies. We are not aware of the consistency of the units of both sides, not all of the senior commanders are identified, and a description of the terrain is also absent. Williams tells us about the initial retreat of certain Norman units, but Anna seems better informed when she writes that this was just the Norman flank commanded by Amiketas and not the entire Norman army as William noted.¹⁶⁶ We are also not informed about retreat of the Varangians that led to the collapse of the Byzantine army's resistance, and William ends his narrative with the words: "Alexius was defeated; his own (soldiers) had retreated. More than five thousand Greeks had lost their lives in that battle, and, between them, a multitude of Turks."¹⁶⁷

For the battle of Larissa, apart from the date of the battle which is not given, Anna Comnena once again takes us to Alexius' war council which took place the previous day.¹⁶⁸ We are informed about the leading officers of the army along with Alexius' stratagem to deceive the Normans. As for the Byzantine battle lines, Anna only tells us that "they (the generals) were instructed to draw up the battle-line according to the principles he himself (Alexius) had followed in former engagements."¹⁶⁹ The narrative, however, is even less detailed for the Normans than it is for the Byzantines, and before the beginning of the battle we know nothing about Bohemond's battle plans or the consistency his army's units. The

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, IV. vi, pp. 209-11; Sewter, pp. 146-8.

¹⁶⁶ *Gesta*, IV. 366-376, p. 224; *Alexiad*, IV. vi, p. 210; Sewter, p. 147.

¹⁶⁷ *Gesta*, IV. 413-416, p. 226.

¹⁶⁸ *Alexiad*, V. v, pp. 169-70.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, V. v, p. 169.

description of the actual battle is realistic, but it lacks the crucial information we need concerning the battle formations and the tactical movements of the two armies in the field.¹⁷⁰

Unfortunately, our Latin sources are far less informed about Bohemond's achievements in the Greek mainland between the years 1082 and 1083, and it seems remarkable that the events in Kastoria, Arta and Larissa are even mentioned. Malaterra probably chose not refer to the turn of events in Greece after the Norman defeat at Larissa. For William of Apulia's narrative on the battle of Larissa, although once more we do not have any numbers for the opposing armies or any estimations for their consistency,¹⁷¹ we are aware of the opposing commanders and the Byzantine battle plan during the first day of fighting which led to the deception of the Normans and the sack of the Norman camp by Alexius' units. As for the aftermath of this battle, the *Gesta* examines the main turn of events that led to the Norman retreat from the area of Larissa, the reasons why the latter had to retreat along with the cities where their officers sought refuge after their defeat in the field.¹⁷²

Regarding the actual siege operation against Dyrrachium by the Normans, Anna Comnena provides a description of the city's defences, although the one given in her twelfth book is much more detailed and accurate, along with the siege equipment that the besieged army had in his disposal.¹⁷³ However, there are no estimated figures of the size of the army that was to defend the city from the Normans nor any comments about the losses inflicted upon them. As for the besiegers, Anna refers to the siege equipment that was brought from Italy, mainly wooden towers, which "terrified the people of Dyrrachium."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Although there is a description of Bohemond trying to teach his men the tactic of a phalanx, on the second day of the battle: *Alexiad*, V. vi, p. 254; Sewter, p. 170; *Alexiad*, V. vii, p. 253-56; Sewter, p. 172.

¹⁷¹ William does mention that there were a number of Turks at Alexius' army, see: *Gesta*, V. 70, p. 240.

¹⁷² *Gesta*, V. 43-74, pp. 238-240.

¹⁷³ *Alexiad*, III. ix, p. 172; IV. i, p. 188; Sewter, pp. 126, 135.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, III. xii, p. 182; IV. i, p. 188; Sewter, pp. 131, 135 .

The siege of Dyrrachium is the only one described by William of Apulia in his *Gesta*, and it is the most detailed we have. Before the beginning of the siege, we are informed of the negotiations between George Monomachatos – the governor of Dyrrachium, later replaced with George Paleologos – and Robert Guiscard for the surrendering of the city to the Normans, a piece of information provided only by William.¹⁷⁵ We also have a few comments on the city itself, including a short paragraph on its history, while we are told that it was “very well fortified” and “surrounded mainly by brick walls.”¹⁷⁶ William tells us that the city was besieged from all sides, while the Norman fleet participated in the attack by blockading the city,¹⁷⁷ and that also a siege tower was constructed to help with the siege.¹⁷⁸ Concerning the situation of the besieged population, their reaction to the attack and their defensive measures, the *Gesta* gives a basic outline of what had happened before the Byzantines decided to send a letter to the Emperor pleading for help.¹⁷⁹ Much to our disappointment, Malaterra’s study of the siege operation consists of only twelve verses of little value compared to the *Alexiad* or the *Gesta*.¹⁸⁰

For the siege of the city of Larissa, the whole operation was overshadowed in Anna Comnena’s narrative by the battle itself and we know next to nothing about the city’s fortifications or the course of the siege apart from the urgent letter dispatched to the Emperor from the governor of the city, Leo Cephalas.¹⁸¹ The siege of Kastoria, however, which took place after the battle of Larissa, is recorded in the *Alexiad* in greater detail. Dates for the siege and the surrender of the town, which was occupied by Bryennius, are not given and we also do not have an estimate for the size of the besieged army. For Alexius’ troops we only know that “they were completely equipped for siege warfare and for fighting in open country” but

¹⁷⁵ *Gesta*, IV. 215-217, p. 216.

¹⁷⁶ “tegalosis obsita muris”: *Ibid.*, IV. 234-243, p. 216.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, IV. 214, 243, p. 216.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, IV. 249-251, p. 218.

¹⁷⁹ *Gest.*, IV. 244-247, p. 216.

¹⁸⁰ Malaterra, 3. 25.

¹⁸¹ *Alexiad*, V. v, pp. 245-7; Sewter, p. 168.

Anna does not say if he dismissed any of his units after his victory at Larissa. Also, there is a description of the city's natural defences, along with the siege equipment of the Normans and the Byzantines which consisted mainly of catapults and helepoleis.¹⁸² In addition to the *Alexiad*, we can conclude from Malaterra's very brief narrative that Guiscard surrounded and attacked the city many times before its surrender, while in the meanwhile he was trying to convince the defenders to come to terms. Further, he mentions that Guiscard did not have siege machines with him, but he does not tell us what have happened to those who were used at Dyrrachium.¹⁸³

Here I have examined the three main primary sources of my research strictly from a military perspective, reaching significant conclusions about their value for eleventh century historiography of warfare. Every medieval chronicler who reported a campaign had the tendency of inflating the numbers of soldiers reported for various reasons at a time. William and Geoffrey were much better informed about the consistency and size of the Norman army, while we have to say the same for the Byzantines and Anna Comnena. However, the vast majority of information we get from all three of our sources has to be dealt with cautiously, because the giving of numbers is not one of the strong points in their narrative. Unfortunately, the absence of relevant record and charter material for this early period of the Norman establishment in Italy make it impossible to be more precise about the numbers engaged in these military campaigns. As I will analyse in the following chapter, the *Catalogus Baronum* is the earliest recorded list of fixed quota owed to King Roger of Sicily, but this was compiled quite late (1150s-60s) and does not reflect eleventh century reality. As for the Byzantine army, the complete lack of charter or archive material, combined with the decline of the thematic armies in the eleventh century and the practice of raising mercenaries

¹⁸² Ibid., VI. i, p. 269; Sewter, pp. 181-2; I will give a detailed definition of these machines in the main part of my thesis.

¹⁸³ Malaterra, 3. 29.

instead (which I discuss in a subsequent chapter), makes any estimate of the size of the Byzantine units deployed at Dyrrachium or Larisa very risky.

The same difficulties exist for our chroniclers' knowledge of the local geography where Robert Guiscard's expeditions took place. None of our sources followed the armies in Illyria or Thessaly and, thus, their descriptions of cities and battlegrounds are vague. Few places, rivers, plains and the surrounding areas of Dyrrachium and Thessaly are described adequately. Modern archaeology has managed to identify a number of the locations mentioned in our sources, including Dyrrachium's fortifications, but there is still much to be done as I will point out later in the main chapters of my thesis. The absence of sufficient dates is also striking, even though we have to remember that all of our authors were writing many years after the events – and in the case of the *Alexiad* some five decades later. As for the description of the two major sieges and battles of Dyrrachium and Larisa, Anna Comnena is our best source even though her presentation of the battle tactics used reveals her lack of knowledge on military affairs. William's description lacks certain important details as well, like names and units, along with the analysis of battle tactics employed by the opposing armies, while Geoffrey Malaterra's account is too short to even be considered.

2. Norman military institutions in southern Italy in the eleventh century: problems and comparisons

In studying the Norman infiltration into southern Italy during the first half of the eleventh century, along with its remarkable effects on Italian and Sicilian society, we need briefly to examine those who migrated from parts of France to Italy as mercenaries, and the factors underlying the substantial Norman migration into southern Italy. In so doing, we should also note another important issue highlighted by scholars such as Graham Loud.¹⁸⁴ Although contemporary chroniclers referred to the bulk of the warriors descending into the peninsula as Normans, it must be asked how 'Norman' was the Norman conquest of southern Italy, and thus how far can we speak of a distinctive 'Norman' form of warfare in the south? And what was its relation to military tactics and organization operating in eleventh century Normandy and, more widely, in France? Serving as an introduction to a discussion of the military organisation of Norman Italy, this chapter attempts to establish a link with the basic military institutions of pre-Conquest Normandy and Anglo-Norman England in the eleventh century.

I. The political and social reasons behind the Norman descend to Italy

¹⁸⁴ G.A. Loud, "How Norman was the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy?", *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, 25 (1981), 13-34.

A factor that certainly had encouraged contacts between France and Italy during the first quarter of the eleventh century was pilgrimage.¹⁸⁵ Italy was the crossing point of every major pilgrimage route leading to the Holy Land, with the Normans appearing as pilgrims in two of the three quite different versions concerning the coming of the Normans to Italy.¹⁸⁶ Amatus of Montecassino writes about a group of forty Norman pilgrims who witnessed a Muslim attack at Salerno while returning from Jerusalem “before the year 1000” and they were recruited by Gaimar IV to help the defenders.¹⁸⁷ William of Apulia’s and Lupus Protospatharius’ version has a group of Norman pilgrims who met with Melus, a Lombard noble, while on pilgrimage on Monte Gargano in 1016, and promised to reinforce the latter’s planned Apulian rebellion against the Byzantines.¹⁸⁸ In each case, the means to purify the soul from sin through pilgrimage had significantly increased the religious and social ties between Normandy and Italy since the beginning of the eleventh century. Finally, we have to highlight the role of the great religious site of the Sanctuary of Monte Sant’ Angelo sul Gargano dedicated to Archangel Michael as the religious link between Jerusalem, Italy and Normandy.¹⁸⁹

Another contributing factor to the Norman migration to the south has been identified as the over-population of Normandy.¹⁹⁰ The classic example of this period is the sons of

¹⁸⁵ For the story of Duke Robert’s voyage to the Holy Land, in 1034, and his death at Nicaea: E. Van Houts, “Normandy and Byzantium”, *Byzantion*, 55 (1985), 544-559.

¹⁸⁶ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 60-66; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 29-46; J. France, “The Occasion of the Coming of the Normans to Southern Italy”, *Journal of Medieval History*, 17 (1991), 185-205; E. Joranson, “The Inception of the Career of the Normans in Italy – Legend and History”, *Speculum*, 23 (1948), 353-96.

¹⁸⁷ Amatus, I. 17-21; *Chron. Casin.*, II. 37, pp. 236-39.

¹⁸⁸ *Gesta*, I. 11-57, pp. 98-102; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1017.

¹⁸⁹ J.C Arnold, “Arcadia Becomes Jerusalem: Angelic Caverns and Shrine Conversion at Monte Gargano”, *Speculum*, 75 (2000), 567-88.

¹⁹⁰ For arguments against this reason: D. Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, Longman, London, 1982, pp. 244-48; J.-M. Martin, *La Pouille du VIe au XIIe Siecle*, Ecole Francaise de Rome, Rome, 1993, p. 521, especially n. 202.

Tancred of Hauteville, whose reasons for venturing to Italy are suggested by Amatus of Montecassino, Geoffrey Malaterra and Orderic Vitalis. According to Amatus “these people [the Normans] had increased to such a number that the fields and orchards were not sufficient for producing the necessities of life for so many”,¹⁹¹ while Malaterra adds that “the sons of Tancred [Hauteville] noticed that whenever their aging neighbours passed away, their heirs would fight amongst themselves for their inheritance resulting in the division of the patrimony – which had been intended to fall to the lot of a single heir – into portions that were too small. [...] Ultimately, with the guidance of God, they came to Apulia, a province of Italy.”¹⁹² Orderic Vitalis highlights the same reason through the last speech he puts into the mouth of Robert Guiscard a few hours before his death in July 1085: “We were born of poor and humble parents and left the barren (*sterile*) country of the Cotentin and homes which could not support us to travel to Rome.”¹⁹³ All of these accounts underline the fact that the division of the family patrimony was a serious issue in eleventh century Normandy and that customs of inheritance dashed the aspirations of many younger sons for acquiring a piece of land for themselves. The type of “joint” tenure, where the younger sons were given a share of the patrimony under the control of their elder brother, which would satisfy the younger members of a family and discourage emigration, only became usual towards the end of the eleventh century.¹⁹⁴ In the case of the Hauteville family, we should not be surprised to see the departure from Normandy of William, Drogo and Humphrey, and gradually in the following decades of Robert Guiscard, Mauger and Roger, half-brothers of the former three.

¹⁹¹ Amatus, I. 1.

¹⁹² Malaterra, I. 5.

¹⁹³ Orderic Vitalis, VII, p. 32.

¹⁹⁴ And even then, only in Normandy and not in England, although it existed since much earlier in France, Germany and Lombard Italy, see: E. Tabuteau, *Transfers of property in eleventh-century Norman law*, Chapel Hill, London, 1988; Cahen, *La Regime Feodal*, pp. 88-9; Loud, “How Norman was the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy?”, 18; R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe, Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950-1350*, Penguin, London, 1994, pp. 47-50; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 54-5.

Apart from the issue of inheritance which affected many young Normans, political factors played an important role in the decision to leave for Italy. Many who did so were exiles¹⁹⁵ – victims of the ducal wrath due to their military or political opposition to him, although some were later pardoned by the duke and reinstated. Others were escaping the bitter conflicts between aristocratic families, during the crucial decades for the rise of aristocratic power (1035-55) as we will see further down, such as the Tosny and the Beaumont families.

But the main driving force behind the expansion of the 1020s-50s to Italy was the political and social disturbances in Normandy and many parts of northern France after the break-down of Robert II's regime in 1034, and especially during William II's minority.¹⁹⁶ These dramatic years between 1047 and 1057 appear in great contrast to the period of greater stability and peace of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries in the duchy, a situation which had attracted political exiles from Anjou and Brittany including families like the Taisson or the Giroie, who would quickly become leading members of the Norman aristocracy. As Bates notes, the dramatic phase of specifically Norman expansion began when the same type of territorial fragmentation and reorganisation of family structures became pronounced within Norman society itself.¹⁹⁷ This point becomes even more significant if we compare the chronologies of the main events in Normandy and the "immigration periods" in Italy. There seems to be a link between periods of particular disturbance in the duchy of Normandy and periods of expansion in Italy. The period of the growing power of Rainulf of Aversa (second half of 1030s) and the establishment of the Normans at Melfi (1041) were preceded by the troubled reign of Richard III (1034-5) and the minority years of William II. The turbulent period of the two invasions of Normandy between 1053 and 1057 filled the ranks of the

¹⁹⁵ The duke's right to exile has Scandinavian origin (*ullac*) and it is first documented in the 1050s: Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, pp. 27-30; Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, pp. 166-67; E. Van Houts, "L'Exil Dans l'Espace Anglo-Normand", *La Normandie et l'Angleterre au Moyen Age*, ed. P. Bouet, V. Gazeau, CRAHM, Caen, 2001, 117-27.

¹⁹⁶ D.C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror, The Norman Impact upon England*, (2nd ed.), Yale University Press, London, 1999, pp. 31-80; Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, pp. 46-93.

¹⁹⁷ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, p. 244.

Normans in Italy just before the Calabrian, Apulian and Sicilian expansion in the decade between 1054 and 1064. The parallels which exist in this chronology of events in Normandy and Italy are more than coincidental.

As already noted, one of the fundamental developments of the first half of the eleventh century Norman society was the establishment of a number of families that gradually came to dominate the provincial administration of the duchy prior to the English invasion, and who also provided the bulk of the Norman aristocratic elite in the newly founded Anglo-Norman kingdom. How this came to be is relatively uncertain, but the phenomenon has been the focus of a number of recent studies.¹⁹⁸ Here, however, we are less concerned with social changes in the pre-Conquest Norman society than with evidence of the links existing between families in Normandy and Italy in the eleventh century.

The first of these is the Norman family of the Tosny which “exported” a member of its family to Italy around the mid-eleventh century.¹⁹⁹ Raoul Glaber gives us a story of how Ralph II fled from the duke’s wrath after having being entrusted with the defence of Tillières in the 1010s and reached Italy, only to return back to Normandy after the defeat at Cannae (1018).²⁰⁰ Another family that had migrated to Normandy, near Argentan in the southern marches, during the last decades of the tenth century, were the Giroie.²⁰¹ The family originally came from Brittany during the reign of Hugh Capet (987-996),²⁰² and being vassals to the powerful Bellême family this enabled them to participate in full to the civil

¹⁹⁸ Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, pp. 83-104; R. Allen Brown, *The Normans and the Norman Conquest*, Constable, London, 1969, pp. 35-60; Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, pp. 99-146; *William the Conqueror*, Tempus, Stroud, 2001, pp. 57-63.

¹⁹⁹ L.R. Menager, “Inventaires des Familles Normandes et Franques Emigrees en Italie Meridionale et en Sicile (XIe-XIIE siecles)”, *Roberto il Guiscardo e il suo tempo. Relazioni e comunicazioni nelle prime giornate normanno-sueve*, Bari, Maggio 1973, 348-9; reprinted in: *Hommes et institutions de l’Italie normande*, Variorum, London, 1981.

²⁰⁰ Rodulphus Glaber, *Historiarum Libri Quinque*, ed. and tr. J. France, Clarendon, Oxford, 1989, III, p. 102; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 37, p. 239.

²⁰¹ Menager, “Inventaires”, 362-3; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 64-71.

²⁰² Orderic Vitalis, III, p. 22.

disturbances of the second quarter of the eleventh century, gaining a significant amount of lands including Montreuil and Echauffour. Arnold of Echauffour, one of Giroie's grandsons, was deprived of his lands and went to exile in Apulia, in 1060, for a period of three years before he was restored.²⁰³ William of Montreuil, another famous grandson of Giroie, was established in Italy soon after 1050 and he married the daughter of Richard of Capua, receiving as dowry the counties of Aquino, Marsia and Campania, while he was also pronounced Duke of Gaeta.²⁰⁴ Finally, Giroie's elder daughter Heremburge was married to a certain Walchelin of Pont-Echanfray and their sons, William and Ralph, later joined Robert Guiscard's army fighting in Italy and Sicily.²⁰⁵

A family connected to the Giroies by blood was the Grandmesnils, who sent members of its lineage not only to Italy but also to the Holy Land, Constantinople and England.²⁰⁶ Robert II Grandmesnil became a monk at St-Evroul, in 1050, and nine years later he was elected abbot of the monastery. In 1061, due to a serious disagreement with Duke William, he left St-Evroul to take his case before Pope Nicolas II and he also paid a visit to Apulia.²⁰⁷ Another member of the family that is mentioned to have been to Italy was Arnold of Grandmesnil, who is named by Orderic in a list of Normans along with the sons of Hauteville, William of Montreuil and three others.²⁰⁸ Other sons and grandsons of Robert acquired secular lordships, like William who married one of Guiscard's daughters but later rebelled and found refuge in

²⁰³ Orderic Vitalis, III, p. 26; Menager, "Inventaires", 309-13.

²⁰⁴ Amatus, IV. 27, VI. 1, 11; Orderic Vitalis, III, p. 58; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. 215.

²⁰⁵ Orderic Vitalis, III, p. 30.

²⁰⁶ J. Decaens, 'Le Patrimoine des Grentemesnil en Normandie, en Italie et en Angleterre aux XIe et XIIe siècles', *Les Normands en Méditerranée aux XI-XII Siècles*, ed. P. Bouet et F. Neveux, Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2001, 123-40; Menager, "Inventaires", 316-7.

²⁰⁷ Orderic Vitalis, III, pp. 40, 74, 90, 96, 98.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, III, p. 58.

Alexius Comnenus' court, sometime in the 1090s. The latter is mentioned by Orderic Vitalis to have taken part at Guiscard's 1084-5 Illyrian campaign.²⁰⁹

Two other Norman families that greatly profited from their descent into Italy from the mid eleventh century were the Blosseviles and the Moulins.²¹⁰ The first were the successors of the Ridels as dukes of Gaeta, while the Moulins on the other hand, coming from the Moulins-la-Marche in the Orne, gave their name to the area of southern Abruzzi, including Venafro, Isernia and Boianno, in the 1050s.²¹¹

Yet if the analysis of the aforementioned families demonstrates the Norman origins or background of many of the high profile adventures to Italy, the Italian sources and charter evidence also refer to those from other parts of France who had come to Italy along with the Normans. Amatus clearly distinguishes the Normans from the French and the Burgundians,²¹² while William of Apulia talks about the habit of the Normans in Italy to welcome anyone, even someone staying close to them, then instructing him in their customs and teaching him their language.²¹³ Four charters from Aversa of the years 1068-73 were issued by men calling themselves *Francus*, or *ex genere Francorum*, something that marks a clear distinction between Normans and Franks,²¹⁴ while from a study of anthroponyms and cognomina of foreigners in eleventh and twelfth century south Italian documents, we can conclude that

²⁰⁹ Ibid., IV, p. 32; VII, p. 32.

²¹⁰ Menager, "Inventaires", 299-300, 332-9, 351-2.

²¹¹ A certain Raoul Moulin is mentioned by William of Apulia at Civitate: *Gesta*, II, 135-6, 170, pp. 138-40; William of Poitiers, I, 28, p. 42; Orderic Vitalis, III, p. 132, n. 1.

²¹² Amatus, I. 5.

²¹³ *Gesta*, I, 165-8, p. 108.

²¹⁴ *Codice diplomatico normanno di Aversa*, ed. A.Gallo, Naples, 1927, 386-7 no. 43, 393-4 no. 48, 396-7 no. 50, 399-401 no. 53; *Registrum Neapolitani Archivii Monumenta*, 6 vols., Naples, 1854-61, v. 63-4, no. 420, as cited by: Loud, "How Norman was the Norman Conquest of Italy?", p. 20, n. 36.

approximately one in three of the “invaders” were of non-Norman origin.²¹⁵ More specifically, charter evidence collected by Professor Menager reveal the origin of a number of non-Norman elements in Italy, between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, of which eleven were Angevin, four were central French, three were Burgundian, thirty-one were Breton, two were from Champagne and five from Flandres.²¹⁶ That clearly reveals the significant role that Bretons, Flemings and other non-Norman elements played in the conquest of the south. An additional research of north French charter evidence, collected by Professor Musset, provides ten names for departures to the south, of which five are Norman, three are men from Chartres, one comes from Anjou and one from Maine.²¹⁷

A number of very interesting conclusions can be drawn regarding the people who infiltrated into southern Italy in the first half of the eleventh century. The reasons behind their migration varied accordingly but we can identify four major categories; pilgrimage to Jerusalem and other Holy places like Monte-Garganno certainly had influenced a large number of people; inheritance issues were also a significant factor in driving people out of Normandy, with the younger and poorer knights choosing the life of a brigand and a mercenary in exile; others might have been political exiles, but the main reason was undoubtedly the political disturbances in Normandy in the 1030s-50s, a period that shaped the Norman society of the post-1050s years. These people were primarily Normans but modern research has highlighted that between a quarter and a third of them were also French from various regions neighbouring Normandy like Anjou, Maine and Brittany and Flemish as well. Thus, the immigrants that arrived in Italy in the first half of the eleventh century were influenced by the forms of lord-vassal relations, and the customs of tenure, military service

²¹⁵ L.R. Menager, “Pesanteur et etiologie de la colonisation Normande de l’Italie”, *Roberto il Guiscardo e il suo tempo. Relazioni e comunicazioni nelle prime giornate normanno-sueve*, Bari, 1973, 204; reprinted in: *Hommes et institutions de l’Italie normande*.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-3, 368-86.

²¹⁷ L. Musset, “Actes inedits du XIe siècle. V. Autour des origines de St-Etienne de Fontenay”, *Bulletin de la Société des Antiquaires de Normandie*, 56 (1963, for 1961-2), 29-31.

and inheritance established in Normandy and other parts of France, and it was expected that they will attempt to enforce these norms, at least in some degree, in the areas which they conquered. In other words, they were about to establish an administrative system based on their own experience from back home *ex nihilo*, that had never been seen in Italy – at least south of Spoleto and the Abruzzi²¹⁸ – before.

Here we must briefly refer to the debate amongst modern historians regarding the so-called *Normannitas*. R.H.C. Davis raised questions about the nature of the Norman expansion and compared the depiction of the *Normannitas* in works of chroniclers such as Dudo of St-Quentin, William of Poitiers, William of Jumièges and Orderic Vitalis.²¹⁹ He draws a distinction between Dudo's work and that of William of Jumièges, based on the notion of the "Frenchness" identified by Dudo and the distinct Danish ancestry highlighted by William. Davis also underlined the unity and indivisibility of Normandy in Dudo's work and the identification of the Normans not as Vikings or French but as people/immigrants who belonged to that land – Normandy, a point developed further by Orderic Vitalis who established the historical connection between Neustria and Normandy. This general notion of the "Frenchness" of the Normans is also supported by D.C. Douglas who considered the Norman conquests of the eleventh century to have been made by men who were French in their language, culture, religion and political ideas.²²⁰

In a different approach to this issue, D. Bates thinks in terms of fusion of cultures; a Scandinavian character stemming from their ancestral roots filtered with elements from the Carolingian character of the land they were settled. He identifies both a tendency for political and economic assimilation, but also the clearly demonstrated self-assertiveness and

²¹⁸ The *beneficia* were introduced in Italy during the Carolingian expansion. See: Cahen, *La Règime Féodal*, p. 24.

²¹⁹ R.H.C. Davis, *The Normans and their Myth*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1997, pp. 49-102; see also the similar views expressed by: G.A. Loud, "The 'Gens Normannorum' – Myth or Reality?", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 4 (1981), 108-110.

²²⁰ Douglas, *The Norman Achievement*, pp. 22-29.

independence of the Norman rulers.²²¹ This view is shared by N. Webber who believes that the assimilation of the Scandinavian and Frankish characteristics in Normandy, in relation with the adoption of the new ethnonym – *gens Normannum* – marked the ethnogenesis of a new people with distinct identity.²²²

But did the Normans consider their conquests in Italy as “Norman” as those in England? What Davis and Bartlett point out is that Norman or English chroniclers of the late eleventh and early twelfth century direct their attention to the south and several of them like to “boast” about the military achievements of their fellow countrymen. Davis points to the examples of William of Malmesbury, Henry of Huntington and especially Orderic Vitalis.²²³ But is there anything to suggest that this notion was reciprocal from the Normans and their chroniclers in the south? Several interesting points can be raised regarding the histories of our three “Italian” chroniclers; that these newcomers were identified predominantly as Normans, with the chroniclers giving their own version of the etymology of the term;²²⁴ the fact that the term Normans played a unifying role between the different bands of them operating in the south, having already encapsulated its cultural identity of the *gens Normannorum* long before 1016; the leaders of the Normans who personified the *Normannitas* and possessed “great martial valour”; several features that are dominant in the “Italian” histories, like the Norman energy (*strenuitas*), courage (*corage*), boldness (*hardiesce*) and valour (*vaillantize*).²²⁵ But although it is clear that the southern Normans were aware of the deeds of their countrymen and recognised Normandy as their place of origin, none of them saw the expansion in Italy as part of the wider achievements of the Norman race. The *Normannitas* could only remain viable in Italy as a notion of identity and unity in a period of constant territorial expansion, but after

²²¹ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, pp. 24-43.

²²² N. Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity*, 911-1154, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2005, pp. 18-39.

²²³ Davis, *The Normans and their Myth*, pp. 62-69, 87-92.

²²⁴ Amatus, I. 1; Malaterra, I. 3; *Gesta*, I. 9-10, p. 98.

²²⁵ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, pp. 85-105; Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity*, pp. 60-71.

the death of Robert Guiscard and especially during the years of monarchy after 1130, the identity of the Normans in the south was redefined, with the Sicilian Kings not showing the slightest interest to appear Norman.²²⁶

II. Military institutions in Normandy, France and England in the eleventh century and their links to southern Italy

In this part of my thesis, my intention is not to go into a thorough examination of the military institutions of the eleventh century Normandy and England in relation to southern Italy, but a summary of key elements will help contextualize what follows concerning the structure and composition of Norman armies in Italy and Sicily, the methods by which they were raised and their limitations in each operational theatre.

In the eleventh century and the first decades of the twelfth century Normandy and Anglo-Norman England, there were two main categories of troops in the service of a senior lord. Those who owed service in return for their lands (enfeoffed knights), and those who fought for pay, the stipendiaries or mercenaries. The two most important military duties of an enfeoffed knight were the duty in the host and castle service. The latter will be analysed in a separate chapter, but concerning the host service there were three types of military service in Normandy and France; the *arrière-ban*, the *service d'host* and the *service de chevauchée* (or *chevalchia*). The mercenaries can be divided into three categories; members of the royal and baronial households that formed the core corps of every medieval army, the professionals hired for a specific campaign or series of military operations who lacked political or social ties to those who employed them and clearly fought for profit; and the armies hired from neighbouring kingdoms or counties and served the king or lord as allies or vassals.

Stipendiary knights

²²⁶ Davis, *The Normans and their Myth*, pp. 84-92; Webber, *The Evolution of Norman Identity*, pp. 71-84; Loud, "The 'Gens Normannorum'", 115-6.

The core of most medieval armies from Charlemagne to Edward III was the household or *familia*, which can be divided into the royal and the baronial familia.²²⁷ Although very rarely mentioned in the primary sources, the *familiae* would have had a key role in the expansion of the Norman principalities in southern Italy between the 1040s-70s, while the small numbers of the Normans in Sicily before 1072 suggests that it would have been they who would have formed the core of the armies that invaded the island since 1061. Malaterra for example refers to the role of Robert Guiscard's household in subduing Calabria in the late 1050s,²²⁸ while in the same early period we also see Roger Hauteville entering Guiscard's household along with other newly arrived Normans. These troops, sixty according to Malaterra, were sent by Robert to Calabria "to make war against many thousands of the enemy."²²⁹ Some 300 *iuvenes* are mentioned after the Norman victory at Castrogiovanni in the summer of 1061 under Roger's orders.²³⁰ The same number of knights appears once more in 1063 when Roger

²²⁷ For more on this, see: W.C. Hollister, *The Military Organization of Norman England*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1965, pp. 167-76; M. Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages, the English Experience*, Yale University Press, London, 2006, pp. 38-48; S.D. Church, *The Household Knights of King John*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 16-39, 74-100; M. Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England, 1066-1166*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1987, pp. 9-43; S. Morillo, *Warfare under the Anglo-Norman Kings, 1066-1135*, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1994, pp. 60-66; G.H. White, "The Household of the Norman Kings", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 30 (1948); S. Harvey, "The Knights and the Knight's Fee in England", *Past and Present*, 49 (1970), 1-43; M. Mallett, "Mercenaries", *Medieval Warfare: A History*, ed. M. Keen, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999, 209-29; S. Morillo, "Mercenaries, Mamluks and Militia, towards a cross-cultural typology of military service", *Mercenaries and Paid Men, the Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, 243-59; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 63-73.

²²⁸ The term *familia* is not mentioned. Malaterra rather uses *sui* and *fideles*: Malaterra, 1. 17.

²²⁹ Malaterra, 1. 19.

²³⁰ See: Malaterra, 2. 16-17; a force of 250 knights would invade the island again in December for a similar plundering expedition to Agrigento: Malaterra, 2. 18; for an interesting examination of the origin of the *iuvenes* (geoguth), the unlanded warriors, and the *emariti milites* (duguth), the veteran landed warriors, in Anglo-Saxon England going back to

returned to Calabria to collect supplies and to distribute lands to his followers before returning to Sicily.²³¹ Malaterra also notes that “*milites et stipendiarii*” garrisoned the cities of Troina and Petralia in 1061, after the citizens surrendered their cities to Roger.²³² Their numbers certainly would not have been great at that early stage; only a hundred and thirty-six knights are said to have defeated the Muslims at Cerami in June 1063,²³³ while another small Norman force clashed with a Muslim army at Misilmeri in 1068.²³⁴

Since the chronicle material does not allow us to draw any solid conclusions about the structure of the Italian-Norman noble households, we can only examine the Anglo-Norman royal familia by way of analogy; it is likely that many similarities existed between them, since the Normans in the south came from the same institutional background as their compatriots in Normandy and post-Conquest England. The Anglo-Norman royal *familia* was remarkably heterogeneous in its composition and it included both landless, unenfeoffed knights and members of great aristocratic families with large estates that owed their rise to their close ties with the king or the great magnates. These *milites* were, in essence, well-trained and experienced troops in the personal service of the king or a great magnate, travelling with him and acting as a bodyguard, carrying messages, helping maintain law and order in his domains and, most importantly, forming a unit of troops that was combat-ready anytime of the year at a very short notice. When in service, the household knights would have been paid a standard daily wage,²³⁵ provided with food and compensated, if necessary, for

the period of Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. See: R. Abels, “Household men, mercenaries and Vikings in Anglo-Saxon England”, *Mercenaries and Paid Men, the Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. J. France, Brill, Boston, 2008, 143-65.

²³¹ Malaterra, 2. 29, 30. Roger had been given half of Calabria by Robert Guiscard a few years before (Malaterra, 1. 29).

²³² *Ibid.*, 2. 20.

²³³ Amatus, V. 23; Malaterra, 2. 33.

²³⁴ Malaterra, 2. 41.

²³⁵ These were only standardized in the mid-thirteenth century. See: Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 84-5; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 94-5; Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 211-3.

the loss of any horses or equipment. An additional income would have been the spoils of any military operation. In times of unrest these troops would have been particularly useful, especially when it comes to the Apulian rebellions in 1067, 1072 and again in 1078. The speed in which Robert Guiscard moved from Calabria to Apulia to suppress the 1067 rebellion seems quite remarkable, if we are to believe Amatus' comments, and this strongly suggests that the Duke had a combat-ready core of troops to besiege Geoffrey of Conversano's stronghold.²³⁶ The quick surrender of the latter forced the rest of the ringleaders to seek for terms. In 1079 Robert was in Calabria when the city of Bari was betrayed to the rebels and again he had to march north with 460 knights, probably those of his ducal household along with mercenaries, to re-establish his authority.²³⁷

The professional mercenaries can be described as a distinct group of elite mounted warriors who were hired to serve in a particular campaign or number of campaigns and were dismissed after the conclusion of the military operations.²³⁸ When called for service they were often incorporated into the *familia* and followed its command structure and regulations. The household knights were preferred to their enfeoffed comrades-in-arms because they could be recruited to service for long periods and they were not subject to any feudal limitations as we will see further down. Both the mercenaries and the household knights were paid from the king's coffers but it is the way that these sums of money had to be raised that

²³⁶ Amatus, V. 4; Malaterra, 2. 29; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 135-6, 239-40.

²³⁷ *Gesta*, III. 539-687, pp. 194-202.

²³⁸ For more on this, see: Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 176-86; *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, pp. 9-24; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 147-53; "War and Finance in the Anglo-Norman State", *Anglo-Norman Warfare*, 59-83; J. Beeler, *Warfare in England, 1066-1189*, Barnes & Noble, New York, 1996, pp. 297-316; E. Cuozzo, *La Cavalleria nel Regno Normanno di Sicilia*, Atripalda, 2002, pp. 71-211, especially pp. 159-74; Mallett, "Mercenaries", 209-29; Abels, "Household men", 143-65; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 90-101; F. Barlow, *The Feudal Kingdom of England, 1042-1216*, Longman, Harlow, 1999, pp. 70-8; for the problematic definitions about the term mercenaries, see: Morillo, "Mercenaries, Mamluks and Militia", 243-59; K. DeVries, "Medieval Mercenaries", *Mercenaries and Paid Men, the Mercenary Identity in the Middle Ages*, 43-60.

caused concern, public anger, protests and even rebellions. The main source of mercenaries for the Norman counts and their Anglo-Norman successors were the Low Countries and Brittany and in many campaigns they would form a large percentage of the Norman or English armies in action. For example, William I relied heavily on his mercenaries for his Hastings campaign and the establishment of his authority in England immediately after that.²³⁹ In southern Italy and Sicily, the noble households and the numerous bands of mercenaries played the most prominent role in the subjugation of the Byzantine outposts in Apulia and Calabria. Sicily also offered some attractive opportunities for stipendiary troops and it was probably they, along with household knights, who formed the core of the armies that repeatedly invaded the island since 1061, faced the Muslims in three pitched battles in the 1060s and manned a number of fortified towns in the north-east of the island. For example, we have the number of about 300 knights placed as garrison of Messina in the late summer of 1061, while a force of 250 knights under Roger crossed to Sicily, in December 1061, for a plundering expedition to the south-west and the city of Agrigento – all of them probably stipendiary troops.²⁴⁰ The numerous bands of Norman knights who had found their way to Italy before the 1050s can be identified as mercenaries by the fact that they were employed by several lords, either Norman, Lombard, Byzantine or German, and because by this early stage the enfeoffment of Normans had been limited. A notable exception is the Normans of Aversa who owed service as vassals to Gaimar V of Capua-Salerno from 1036 to 1042.²⁴¹

²³⁹ *The Chronicle of John of Worcester*, 3 vols., ed. R.R. Darlington and P. McGurk, Clarendon, Oxford, 1995, vol. II, pp. 604-7, vol. III, pp. 4-19; *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy, Bishop of Amiens*, ed. and tr. by F. Barlow, Clarendon, Oxford, 1999, p. 37; Beeler, *Warfare in England*, pp. 11-2, 298; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 147-9; M. Chibnall, *Anglo-Norman England, 1066-1166*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1986, p. 15.

²⁴⁰ Malaterra, 2. 18, 20.

²⁴¹ Malaterra, 1. 6.

We read for the first time in Malaterra about Robert Guiscard's household while the latter was in the first stages of subduing Calabria in 1057 and about the employment of Slavs as mercenaries.²⁴² "By giving them gifts and promising them even more in the future he had practically transformed them into brothers."²⁴³ – Malaterra's words reveal the fundamental idea behind Robert Guiscard's hiring of troops; no regular fixed pay would have been offered in this early period of expansion but rather numerous promises for future gifts, lands and booty.²⁴⁴ Such would have been the main source of (irregular) income for Robert Guiscard and Roger, which would have been mainly in cash, along with tribute money and profits from diplomacy, such, for example, as the marriage negotiations between Guiscard and Constantine Doukas in the 1070s.²⁴⁵ It is therefore no coincidence that a large number of knights abandoned Roger after 1064, when the Sicilian theatre of operations was at a standstill – there were no opportunities for enrichment and plundering. And we can also understand Guiscard's anxiety for regularly rewarding his followers with large sums of money. Referring to the great ransom gained from Peter of Tira, a leading citizen of Bisignano, Malaterra noted of the 1057 campaign in Calabria: "After receiving such a large amount of money, Guiscard strengthened his men's fidelity toward him by abundantly rewarding them."²⁴⁶

²⁴² Already since the mid-seventh century there were Slavic colonies in Bari, the Capitanata, in Calabria as well as in Sicily. See: Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 504-9; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 111, 216; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 187-88.

²⁴³ Malaterra, 1. 16.

²⁴⁴ One characteristic example is the robbing of a group of rich merchants travelling from Amalfi to Melfi by the troops of Roger Hauteville (1057). This, according to Malaterra, secured the former the services of a hundred knights for further plundering expeditions in Apulia: Malaterra, 1. 23-25, 26.

²⁴⁵ On the monetary economy of southern Italy in the eleventh century, see G.A Loud, "Coinage, Wealth and Plunder in the Age of Robert Guiscard", *English Historical Review*, 114 (Sept. 1999), 815-43; Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 401-85.

²⁴⁶ Malaterra, 1. 17, 23.

However, service from vassals and fideles was, indeed, asked when large-scale operations were to take place like the sieges of Bari and Palermo and the invasion of Sicily in 1061.²⁴⁷ The first example of a large-scale mobilization of the southern Italian magnates took place in 1067/8, just months before the beginning of the siege of Bari. Robert Guiscard needed all the troops he could get and it was this demand, along with Byzantine money as we will see in a following chapter, that sparked a rebellion by some of his leading magnates (January 1067). According to Malaterra, an incident that involved Geoffrey of Conversano got out of hand when Guiscard demanded military service and Geoffrey argued that he owed him service only for the lands the duke had given him and not for what he had conquered on his own.²⁴⁸ Geoffrey of Conversano had arrived in Apulia in the early 1060s, thus not having taken place in the Melfi arrangements of 1042 between the “twelve Norman captains”, and in theory he should not have disputed Guiscard’s authority as Duke of Apulia and Calabria (styled by Pope Nicolas II in 1059) and deny him military service for the lands in southern Apulia where he had established himself.

Enfeoffed knights

The *arrière-ban* can be seen as one of the most interesting obligations of this period which concerned the general levy of all able-bodied freemen to defend their land in a case of an emergency, defined by the high-ranking officials like a prince or the king himself. It was not considered to be an obligation from a vassal to his lord or a kind of military service associated with tenures and fiefs, but it was based on the ancient sense of duty of all men to

²⁴⁷ If we are to believe Amatus’ numbers of 1,000 knights and 1,000 foot, a large amount of them should have been enfeoffed knights and their followers from Apulia and Calabria.

²⁴⁸ Malaterra, 2. 39; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 133-34; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 178-85.

defend their nation from a foreign threat.²⁴⁹ It also presented a great opportunity for the prince to call upon the full military power of his realm, by short-circuiting the feudal hierarchy. The term, probably stemming from the Carolingian *heriban* – a kind of military tax – developed after Courtrai to a summon of all fief-holders regardless if they were subjects of the king, lay lords or ecclesiastical institutions.²⁵⁰ However, the vagueness of the chronicle material does not help us in determining whether the *arrière-ban* was called many times by the Norman dukes, due to the expected aristocratic opposition, and what was the kind of emergencies they manufactured. This obligation was further introduced in the Crusader states of the Latin East in the period of the First Crusade and its aftermath, at a time when the Latin Princes were in a desperate need for able-bodied men.²⁵¹ For the later Anglo-Norman period, the mentioning of the *arrière-ban*, or of the *nomen praelii* under which it frequently appears in the records, can first be seen in the Bayeux Inquest of 1133.²⁵²

Concerning the middle ranks of the feudal hierarchy, the *service de chevauchée* (*chevalchia*) was a more informal type of duty from a vassal to his lord.²⁵³ As it is made perfectly clear: only those who possessed regalian rights could summon the host, which is the fundamental distinction between the *chevalchia* and the *service d'host*. The military force which was requested at each case was to be of modest size, or even a fraction of the *servitium debitum*, like the one fifth or one tenth as it should have happened in Norman England by

²⁴⁹ P. Guilhaumez, *Essai sur l'origine de la noblesse en France au moyen age*, Picard, Paris 1902, pp. 289ff.; Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 77-84; for a brief introduction to the *arrière-ban*, see: Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, pp. 22-3; for a comparison with the military tradition of the “people-in-arms”, or “great-fyrd” as termed by Hollister, see: C.W. Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1962, pp. 25-37.

²⁵⁰ Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 87-8, 155-57.

²⁵¹ R.C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare (1097-1193)*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1956, pp. 88-106; D. Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, Continuum, London, 2007, pp. 13-4.

²⁵² Guilhaumez, *Essai*, pp. 292-3.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 261-2; Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, pp. 22-24; Stenton, *English Feudalism*, pp. 176-77; Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 76-77, 81-83, also see Hollister’s criticism of Stenton’s definition of the *chevalchia* in pp. 83-86.

William I, with the intention being more localised and limited in extent, like the siege of a castle, the pursuit of a fugitive or just the escort of the lord.²⁵⁴ Since the general summons for a service d'host could only have been issued by the king himself or by the prince and only for an important reason, the service de chevauchée could have been ordered by a lesser lord. In this case, the enfeoffed knights were obliged to follow their lord wherever the latter wished and for any purpose, bearing in mind however that the time frame must have been quite limited in most cases. Although the service does not appear in the Norman records by name before 1066, it leaves little doubt that it must have been a significant obligation in post-Conquest Normandy, appearing in the Inquests of 1133 and 1172.²⁵⁵ If this is the case, and if we consider the degree of wide-spread private warfare in the duchy of Normandy, especially during William I's accession and minority years, it is highly likely that the *chevalchia* would have been known in pre-Conquest Normandy as well.

The king himself or one of the great princes of the kingdom of France, such as the duke of Normandy,²⁵⁶ could officially summon the feudal quotas of their realm, with this military obligation of all the tenants-in-chief being identified as *service d'host (expeditio)*.²⁵⁷ In comparison to the arrière-ban, the service d'host was more limited in numbers but its purpose was not restricted to cases of emergency. However, the enfeoffed knights serving under the king's banner were theoretically limited to serve only up to the frontiers of the realm, and in the case of Normandy they could not proceed outside the Norman frontiers, which meant that they could participate only in a defensive royal campaign against an invading force or in some disputed marcher area, like i.e. Maine.²⁵⁸ It was after the Conquest that a number of

²⁵⁴ J. Sanders, *Feudal Military Service in England*, Oxford University Press, London, 1956, p. 32; Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 74-6.

²⁵⁵ Hollister, *Norman England*, p. 82.

²⁵⁶ Or by a baron of the important marcher areas.

²⁵⁷ Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 76-77, 81; Stenton, *English Feudalism*, pp. 177-78.

²⁵⁸ Hollister, *Norman England*, p. 81; Stenton, *English Feudalism*, p. 178.

magnates owed over-seas service due to them holding lands in both sides of the Channel.²⁵⁹ However, this limitation could be overcome at the expense of the suzerain and with a sharp reduction in the quotas,²⁶⁰ although there are cases to show that this rule was not so strictly enforced.²⁶¹ Further, there was a time limit to the employment of the baronial *servitia debita*, with the knights being obliged to serve at their own expense in the lord's host for no more than forty days a year.²⁶² This specific number of days was first mentioned in Italy in 1095,²⁶³ while in Normandy it is found on the Bayeux Inquest of 1133, where it appears as the regular period for the service due to the king of France as well as for that owed to the duke within the confines of Normandy.²⁶⁴ In the twelfth century Kingdom of Jerusalem, however, the service "inside" the kingdom was established by the *Haute Cour* at one year.²⁶⁵

Bearing in mind what we have examined so far about the feudal service, we have to examine two known cases that deviated from the aforementioned limitations: William the Conqueror's Hastings campaign and Robert Guiscard's expedition in Illyria in 1081. But before that, we must address a number of the earliest cases of overseas expeditions where the

²⁵⁹ Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 101-11; see the characteristic example of the dispute between King John I and his northern magnates in 1213-14, regarding over-seas service in France: J.C. Holt, *The Northerners*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1992, pp. 79-108, especially pp. 87-95; S. Painter, *The Reign of King John*, John Hopkins, Baltimore, 1949, pp. 278-84.

²⁶⁰ Cahen, *La Regime Feodal*, p. 64; Hollister, *Norman England*, p. 100; F.M. Powicke, *The Loss of Normandy*, (2nd ed.), Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1961, p. 218.

²⁶¹ *Alexandrini Telesini Abbatis Ystoria Rogerii Regis Sicilie, Calabrie atque Apulie*, ed. L. De Nava, F.S.I., Rome, 1991, p. 279.

²⁶² Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, pp. 20-21; Stenton, *English Feudalism*, p. 177; M. Chibnall, "Military Service in Normandy Before 1066", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 5 (1982), 74-75; as late as 1172 there are indications that the length of service was not entirely uniform. For the debate on the term of military service required, see: Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 89-111; idem, "The Annual Term of Military Service in Medieval England", *Medievalia et Humanistica*, 13 (1960), 40-47; Beeler, *Warfare in England*, pp. 281-83.

²⁶³ "... per unumquemque annum unius militis per XL dies ei dare debeo servitium", Ughelli, *Italia Sacra*, ed. Coletti, vol. 6, Venice, 1713, p. 700; Cahen, *La Regime Feodal*, p. 63, n. 2.

²⁶⁴ Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, pp. 19-20.

²⁶⁵ Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 14-5; Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p. 98, n. 3.

Normans took part. First, we have the Byzantine expedition in Sicily (1038-41) when Gaimar V of Salerno, as an Imperial vassal, was asked to furnish troops for the campaign. He chose to send the “restless” Normans who had been his vassals since May 1038 under German recognition.²⁶⁶ As Malaterra notes, Gaimar saw this “as an opportunity to send away the Normans in his service without slighting them. In an effort to encourage the Normans to go, he [Gaimar V] made much of the gifts which had been promised to them [Normans] by Maniaces [the Byzantine general], enumerating them in his own words, even promising to add more of his own.”²⁶⁷ In essence, what Malaterra is referring to is a bargain between the Duke of Salerno and his vassal the Count of Aversa, with promises of generous gifts and large sums of money being made if the Normans were enticed to serve overseas to Sicily, although they were under no formal obligation to do so.

Continuing with Hastings, although the chronicler material is scarce concerning William’s preparations for this campaign, we are informed from Wace, in his *Roman de Rou*,²⁶⁸ writing about a hundred years after the Conquest, about the war councils William had with the most important magnates of his realm. We follow a dialogue between William Fitz Osbern, who reminds the rest of the magnates that they owed military service to the duke in return of their fiefs, with the latter answering that they were not bound to serve beyond the sea.²⁶⁹ However, we need to make it clear at this point that in the pre-Conquest period we cannot talk about fixed quotas of the senior magnates who were serving under William II. Later, we find William Fitz Osbern suggesting to the duke that each magnate was “willing” to provide at least double of what they owed to him, with the Conqueror negotiating with each one of them separately for their “contribution” of knight and ship service. But in what way were the magnates persuaded to serve their duke beyond the Channel? The most adequate answer

²⁶⁶ Amatus, II, 3; Malaterra, I, 6; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 63, pp. 288-93.

²⁶⁷ Malaterra, I, 7.

²⁶⁸ *The history of the Norman people: Wace's Roman de Rou*, translated by G. S. Burgess with notes by G. S. Burgess and E. van Houts, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2004.

²⁶⁹ Wace, II, 111 (IIIe partie, vv. 6069-72, 6083-4, 6085-6).

seems to be that the duke proposed to each of his men a minimum contribution to the English campaign, based on each one's possessions, with the latter being free to contribute more, depending on their desire for rewards if the campaign was successful.²⁷⁰ By doing this, William would have wanted to assess his strength and decide whether a campaign of such importance would have been feasible. William's army was, in short, an army of stipendiaries and fideles; although some among them owed military service to their suzerain, were not following him overseas as direct result of that obligation but rather as fellow adventures seeking lands, booty and money.

Comparing William's Channel operation with their fellow country-men in the south, in 1081, Robert Guiscard gathered according to Malaterra a "poorly armed mob" (*imbecille vulgus*),²⁷¹ while Anna Comnena describes these footsoldiers (Greeks and Lombards) as "over age and under age, pitiable objects."²⁷² Probably, these troops were ducal levies conscripted to serve overseas as a result of Guiscard calling for the *arrière-ban* – although no term of this kind appear in the primary sources – to be assembled for his expedition overseas.²⁷³ But since the lords of the realm had no feudal obligation to serve in Illyria, what would have changed their minds? We presume that a much similar pattern with the 1066 negotiations must have been followed. Although the chronicler material is silent about any formal or informal talks between the Duke and his magnates and the promises, which almost certainly would have been made,²⁷⁴ or about any further details concerning the rates of wages paid to the leading commanders of the Norman army. In order to make any expedition more

²⁷⁰ E. Van Houts, "The Ship List of William the Conqueror", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 10 (1987), 171-2; Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 17-8; Mallett, "Mercenaries", 210-212.

²⁷¹ Malaterra, 3. 24 .

²⁷² *Alexiad*, I. xiv, pp. 68-9; Sewter, p. 65; *Gesta*, IV. 128-33, p. 210.

²⁷³ This stands as a contrast to the Anglo-Saxon fyrd that William takes to Scotland in 1072 and into Maine next year. See: Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 110-11, 116-18.

²⁷⁴ Only Anna Comnena talks about the long overdue wages owed by Bohemond to his vassal commanders after the siege of Larissa in the summer of 1083: *Alexiad*, V. vii, p. 256; Sewter, p. 173.

lucrative for a greedy medieval nobleman, promises for a number of estates in the conquered regions were given.²⁷⁵ Rather later, in the early twelfth century, a fixed sum of money was promised to a lord or prince,²⁷⁶ paid either annually or quarterly, with the latter being obliged to recruit a fixed number of men and transport them to an agreed place at his own cost, as happened with Henry I and Count Robert of Flanders in 1101, a case from where it emerged the contract service or the money-fief (*fief-rente*).²⁷⁷

But another question arises that needs to be addressed, albeit briefly. Were the quotas owed by the great magnates in pre-Conquest Normandy to their lords definitely fixed or were they based on vague arrangements between the two parties? The prevalent view since the beginning of the twentieth century was Haskins' argument that fixed quotas of military service were imposed in ducal Normandy before 1050.²⁷⁸ This thesis, however, has been challenged due to most recent interpretations of the primary material starting with an article written by Marjorie Chibnall²⁷⁹ and works like those of Yver²⁸⁰, Bates²⁸¹ and Douglas²⁸². D.C. Douglas believes that the terminology of the Norman charters of this time is

²⁷⁵ Compare with William's promises to his troops in the campaign of 1069/70: Orderic Vitalis, II, pp. 234-35

²⁷⁶ These were only standardized in the mid-thirteenth century. See: Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 84-5; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 94-5; Hollister, *Norman England*, pp. 211-3.

²⁷⁷ H. Delbruck, *History of the Art of War*, vol. III, University of Nebraska Press, London, 1990, p. 316; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 90-91; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 93; Mallett, "Mercenaries", 211-215.

²⁷⁸ Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, pp. 8-15; see also: J.H. Round, *Feudal England*, Swan Sonnenschein & Co., London, 1895; Haskins bases some of his arguments in Round's conclusions.

²⁷⁹ Chibnall, "Military Service", 65-77.

²⁸⁰ J. Yver, "Les Premieres Institutions du Duche de Normandie", *I Normanni e la loro espansione in Europa nell'alto medioevo*, *Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo*, 16, (1969), 334-7, 591.

²⁸¹ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*.

²⁸² Douglas, *William the Conqueror*.

characteristic of an age in which feudal obligations have not yet been fully defined.²⁸³ In support of this there is an entire analysis of the use of the terms *feudum*, *beneficium*, *alodium* and *miles* which can be found in pre-Conquest and post-Conquest charters.²⁸⁴ It is at least arguable, according to Chibnall, that the services owed were either relics of older, Carolingian obligations, or the outcome of individual life contracts between different lords and their vassals, and that their gradual systematisation was the result of the intense military activity of the period of the Conquest.²⁸⁵

We have already seen the main reasons behind the descend of the Normans to southern Italy and Sicily – reasons that varied from pilgrimage to social unrest in the Duchy, and indeed how many of them were coming from other parts of France as well, places neighbouring Normandy like Brittany or Anjou. Coming from the same institutional background, we would expect that the Normans would introduce to Italy the administrative system of pre-Conquest Normandy. What is striking, though, is the absence of any primary or charter material from the eleventh century that would confirm this assumption. But from whatever information we can get from our primary sources, it is highly likely that stipendiary household troops and mercenaries, under the command of Guiscard, Roger and other great magnates, played a prominent role in the territorial expansion in Apulia, Calabria and Sicily. In addition, military service from vassals and fideles was asked for large-scale operations like the siege of Bari and Palermo and the 1081 Illyrian campaign, with institutions like the *arrière-ban* being called – although not clearly identified by our primary sources. A significant difference, however, with post-Conquest England of the period between 1070-87 – when the entire country was claimed by William by the right of conquest and lands were given to great magnates – was the precisely defined and rigidly enforced *servitium debitum*. In eleventh century Norman Italy, just like in pre-Conquest Normandy, the members of the

²⁸³ Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, pp. 96-98.

²⁸⁴ Chibnall, “Military Service”, 66-68; Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, p. 97; Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, pp. 122-27, 168-72.

²⁸⁵ Chibnall, “Military Service”, 66.

powerful aristocratic families did not regard their holding of lands as a result of any ducal grant, thus no specified number of knights was demanded for military service.

Well-established feudal quotas did not exist in southern Italy and Sicily before the compilation of the famous *Catalogus Baronum*.²⁸⁶ This was the register of the defence force levied during the years from 1150 to 1168 by the Norman Kings of Sicily in the mainland provinces of Apulia and Capua in the case of an attack from the north or a rebellion. It notes in detail the precise amount of each man's service owed to the King which had been established in a series of provincial courts. The *catalogus*, however, does not reflect in any way the military situation of the Norman state before the 1150s and before that period there is no record from where we can firmly establish what sort of military service a suzerain was to receive from his knights and their followers. It can be argued that, as it was the case with post-Conquest England, the systematisation of the services owed by vassals to their lords was to be a gradual procedure that surpassed the Norman expansion in southern Italy and Sicily in the eleventh century. It was to be the firm leadership of Roger II and the external threat by two Empires, the German and the Byzantine, in the aftermath of the Second Crusade that resulted to the *quaternus magne expeditionis*, as the *catalogus* should be referred to more accurately.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ *Catalogus Baronum*, ed. E. Jamison, Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, Rome, 1972.

²⁸⁷ The development of knight service in the Kingdom of Sicily after the 1150s is beyond the scope of this research. For more on this, see the detailed studies by: E. Cuozzo, *La Cavalleria nel Regno Normanno di Sicilia; "Quei maledetti Normanni." Cavalieri e organizzazione militare nel Mezzogiorno normanno*, Naples, 1989; E. Cuozzo, J.M. Martin, *Cavalieri alla conquista del Sud. Studi sull'Italia normanna in memoria di Leon-Robert Menager*, Rome-Bari, 1998; Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 301-28, 749-95, especially pp. 768ff.

3. Castle-service and castle-building in Normandy, England and southern Italy: a contextual study

As an additional chapter to the previous section that deals with the military institutions in Normandy, France and England, in this part of my thesis I intend to expand my research into the building of fortifications in the same period (tenth to early twelfth centuries) in Western Europe and in southern Italy and Sicily as well. I will base my research on the examination of the several types of urban and rural fortifications while focusing on the transition from the “burgh and curtis” to the motte-and-bailey type. My intention is neither to go into detailed analysis of the castles and fortifications in Western Europe and Italy in the eleventh century, but rather to establish a link between these regions. And that is precisely what the reader will find in the second part of this chapter where I analyse the pre-existing fortifications in the Italian peninsula and Sicily along with the Norman building activity in the same period.

The establishment of earth-and-timber and stone fortifications in Normandy and England in the eleventh century

The period of Norman expansionism in southern Italy coincides with a widespread phenomenon that had begun to appear in mainland Europe during that same period. It has been termed as the *encastellation* of Europe, which took place between the tenth and the

thirteenth centuries and was of cardinal importance for the continent's political, social and military structure.²⁸⁸ But even before the introduction of a new *castrum* in Europe, fortified sites did exist since the Roman times, with the characteristic Anglo-Saxon *burgh*²⁸⁹ and the Frankish *curtis* – settlements enclosed by a large ditch, an earth bank and very often reinforced with a wooden palisade or a stone wall, often forming the administrative centre of royal or baronial estates.²⁹⁰ But around the end of the tenth century a new type of fortification emerged that would dominate Western Europe until the mid-twelfth. It was significantly smaller²⁹¹ and taller and its main building material was earth and timber; it was seignorial rather than communal, generally cheaper and involved much less work and it could also be defended even by a few dozen soldiers.²⁹² But it was clear that these earth-and-timber fortifications were inadequate to provide long-term security, mainly because of maintenance reasons. Thus much more secure and impressive structures would come to replace them after

²⁸⁸ Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 65.

²⁸⁹ For the Anglo-Saxon *burgh*, see: R. Higham, P. Barker, *Timber Castles*, Batsford, London, 1992, pp. 30-61; D.F. Renn, *Norman Castles in Britain*, Baker, London, 1968, pp. 2-3; N. Pounds, *The Medieval Castle in England and Wales: A social and political history*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 3-71; K. DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, Broadview, Ontario, 1992, pp. 194-7; B. Bachrach, R. Aris, "Military Technology and Garrison Organization: Some Observations on Anglo-Saxon Military Thinking in Light of the Burghal Heritage", *Technology and Culture*, 31 (1990), 1-17; M. Strickland, "Military Technology and Conquest: the Anomaly of Anglo-Saxon England", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 9 (1996), 369-82.

²⁹⁰ For an introduction into the fortifications in England and the Continent before the late tenth century, see: DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, pp. 174-201.

²⁹¹ A motte-and-bailey covered an area of around 360 yards², while an Anglo-Saxon *burgh* around 380.000 yards². See: Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, p. 66.

²⁹² J.R. Kenyon, *Medieval Fortifications*, Continuum, London, 2005, pp. 3-39; R. Allen Brown, *English Medieval Castles*, B.T.Batsford, London, 1954, pp. 23-34; J. Bradbury, *The Medieval Siege*, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1992, p. 51; DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, pp. 202-3; M. Bouard, "Quelques donees Francaises et Normanded concernant le probleme de l'origine des mottes", *Chateau Gaillard*, 2 (1964), 19-26; A. Debord, "Les fortifications de terre en Europe occidentale du Xe au XIIIe siecles", *Archaeologie Medievale*, 11 (1981), 83-85, 90.

the late eleventh century, the *keep-and-bailey* castles and the tower keeps, two types of fortification where the main building material was stone.²⁹³ However, there is plenty of documentary evidence to suggest that timber castles continued to be used until the fourteenth century.²⁹⁴

In England, the greatest period of castle building was during the reign of the Conqueror (1066-86), when fortifications were established in a naked land and in great speed. With a total number of known mottes and ring works in England numbering 625,²⁹⁵ most of them were concentrated in strategic areas like the Welsh marches, the south-east and north-west of England.²⁹⁶ A further 36 stone castles were built of which 24 were attached to major urban centres.²⁹⁷ In brief, the Norman Conquest resulted in (a) a radically new type of fortification: the *motte-and-bailey*, (b) the introduction of the private castle as a new administrative system, and (c) a dramatic increase in the number of fortified places.

This great increase in the number of castles build in England in the first period after Hastings had to do with the Norman re-use and/or the modification of many pre-existing enclosures and fortified sites in England, either from the Saxon or often the Roman times – to name Pevensey (Sept. 1066), Dover (Oct. 1066) and Hastings (1066) as three typical

²⁹³ Stone castles (*keep-and-bailey*) could be seen by the tenth century but they were extremely rare. For this transition see: Bartlett, *The Making of Europe*, pp. 68-9; Allen Brown, *English Medieval Castles*, pp. 35-7; DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, pp. 213-25.

²⁹⁴ R. Highman, "Timber Castles: a Reassessment", *Anglo-Norman Castles*, ed. R. Liddiard, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2003, 107.

²⁹⁵ Higham, Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 47; R. Eales, "Royal Power and Castles in Norman England", *The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood III*, eds. C. Harper-Bill, R. Harvey, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1990, 54-63.

²⁹⁶ Shropshire, Herefordshire and Yorkshire alone numbered 177 mottes: Higham, Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 47; Beeler, *Warfare in England*, Appendix A, B, pp. 397-438.

²⁹⁷ *The History of the King's Works*, ed. H.M. Colvin, 6 vols., H.M.S.O., London, 1963-82, I, p. 22, fig. 5.

examples.²⁹⁸ What is quite striking is that during exactly the same period, meaning roughly between the 1060s-80s, the same phenomenon was taking place in southern Italy and Sicily. The intense military activity in the Italian peninsula in the previous two centuries, the rise of a great number of fortified rural communities in the late tenth century (*incastellamento*) and the long history of castle building by the Byzantines and the Arabs can explain why the “Italian” Normans gladly settled for the occupation or modification of pre-existing fortified sites.

Crossing into France, the general concept is that castles up to the late eleventh century were primarily made of timber and they stayed in use for a long period.²⁹⁹ In Brittany, it is almost certain that the building of mottes was established around the beginning of the eleventh century, mostly in the south marches, and went on through the twelfth century.³⁰⁰ It has also been suggested that the motte-and-bailey castle may be traced to Fulk Nerra of Anjou (987-1040) and his son Geoffrey Martel.³⁰¹ It is very likely that in the southern marches of his county, on the borders with Maine and Anjou, that William learned to appreciate the significance of these earth-and-timber castles. Another theory wants the castle to have a Scandinavian origin, being the response to the Frankish defences of the areas in the Loire and Seine where the Vikings were frequently raiding.³⁰² Whatever the case, it is certain

²⁹⁸ Higham, Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 59; B. English, “Towns, Mottes and Ring-works of the Conquest”, *The Medieval Military Revolution*, eds. A. Ayton, J.L. Price, Tauris, London, 1995, 45-62; Pounds, *The Medieval Castle in England and Wales*, pp. 207-8.

²⁹⁹ Higham, Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 94.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁰¹ G. Fournier, *Le Chateau dans la France Medievale*, Aubier Montaigne, Paris, 1978, p. 67; Renn, *Norman Castles in Britain*, p. 4; J. Le Patourel, *The Norman Empire*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1976, p. 304; DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, pp. 204, 213-4; B. Bachrach, “Fortifications and Military Tactics: Fulk Nerra’s Strongholds circa 1000”, *Technology and Culture*, 20 (1979), 531-49; *idem*, “The Angevin Strategy of Castle Building in the Reign of Fulk Nerra, 987-1040”, *American Historical Review*, 88 (1983), 171-207.

³⁰² Edbury, *The Medieval Siege*, pp. 50-51.

that the knowledge in building motte-and-bailey castles spread out from northern France to England, Italy and Sicily in the eleventh century.

In pre-Conquest Normandy the construction of new fortifications, adding to the existing Carolingian, began in the early years of Richard II's reign (996-1026). Especially during the civil wars in Normandy in the 1030s-50s, a period which saw the rise of the new Norman aristocracy, the number of ducal or baronial castles rose rapidly, in striking contrast to their small numbers before the death of Robert I (1035). By the 1020s powerful ducal castles have been built in strategic locations in the duchy, like those of Mortain, Brionne-sur-Risle, Fecamp, St-Lo, Ivry, Evreux, Eu and Exmes. All of these sites can be traced back to the late ninth century, while some of them played a significant defensive role not only during the Carolingian period but as early as the late Roman period.³⁰³ Richard II added Tillieres-sur-Avre, while Breteuil, Ambrieres and Neufmarche were established by William II in this developing frontier barrier.³⁰⁴ This list can be supplemented with numerous motte-and-bailey castles – twenty-four in total, either ducal or baronial – built in Normandy before 1066 and used in the civil conflicts of the period and in the wars against the Count of Anjou.³⁰⁵

Norman fortifications in Apulia

Historians have identified two types of fortifications in Byzantine Apulia, the enclosed cities (*kastra*) and a number of smaller fortified sites (*kastellia*).³⁰⁶ And there are also two

³⁰³ J. M. Yver, "Les chateaux forts en Normandie jusqu'au milieu du XIIe siecle", *Bulletin societe des antiquaire de Normandie*, 53 (1955), 33-36, 52-58.

³⁰⁴ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, p. 57.

³⁰⁵ Higham, Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 102; Yver, "Les chateaux forts", 52-59.

³⁰⁶ V. Von Falkenhausen, *La dominazione bizantina nell'Italia meridionale dal IX all'XI secolo*, Bari, 1978, pp. 148-9; Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 258-70. On the Greek mainland we can identify three more types: the towers (*pyrgoi*) that appear in the beginning of the tenth century, the long walls built at strategic locations like the *Hexamilion* in Corinthos, and the

periods when renovations of old Roman and Lombard fortifications and the new building of *kastra* and *kastellia* took place; at the end of the ninth century after the reestablishment of Imperial power in the province, and at the beginning of the eleventh century while the Empire was expanding north into the *Capitanata*.³⁰⁷ However, the most striking element of the Byzantine society in Longobardia was the contradiction between the enclosed urban societies of the coastal areas and the undefended rural population of the mainland (*chorion*).³⁰⁸ The *kastro* in Byzantine Longobardia can be described briefly as a large city enclosed by walls which was the administrative centre and the seat of the bishop. Ancient cities that evolved gradually into sizeable and important administrative centres were Bari, Trani, Taranto, Montescaglioso, Cannae and Brindisi.³⁰⁹ These cities, however, did not possess any complex defensive fortifications but the ordinary stone city walls, which were usually two (*muricinum*, *antemurale*), a ditch, flanking towers in the city's gates and quite possibly extra wall defences in the city's port.³¹⁰ In this castle environment the *kastra* were supplemented by the *kastellia*, secondary smaller *kastra* that were situated either in a strategic area or usually in the surroundings of a major fortified city, like the small towns of Troia,³¹¹ Fiorentino, Montecorvino,³¹² Dragonara, Civitate and Melfi³¹³ which were built after the Byzantine

monastery complexes that took the form of enclosures and first appeared in Macedonia and Mount Athos: *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, pp. 24-26.

³⁰⁷ Martin, *La Pouille*, p. 261.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-70.

³⁰⁹ J.-M. Martin, "Modalités de l'incastellamento" et typologie castrale en Italie méridionale (Xe-XIIe siècles)", *Castelli. Storia e archeologia. Relazioni e comunicazioni al Convegno di Cuneo (1981)*, ed. R. Comba, A.A. Settia, Turin, 1984, 96-98; *La Pouille*, pp. 258-66.

³¹⁰ Martin, "Modalités", 96.

³¹¹ For Troia and the act official act of its foundation, see: F. Trincherà, *Syllabus Graecarum Membranarum*, Naples, 1895, n. 18; Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 259-60.

³¹² For the site and plans of the town of Montecorvino, see: J.-M. Martin, G., Noye, "La cite de Montecorvino et sa cathedrale", *Melanges de l'Ecole Francaise de Rome – Moyen Ages – Temps Modernes*, 114 (1982), 513-49.

³¹³ Amatus, II. 19; *Gesta*, I. 245-53, p. 112; Malaterra, I. 9; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, p. 170.

victory at Cannae in 1018. Next year, a Norman garrison was permanently established at the strong strategic fortress of Troia under Byzantine pay.³¹⁴

During the period of Norman expansion in Apulia (1040s-70s), their first action after taking over of a fortified site was to build an inner fortification in the town and man it with a Norman garrison, like the cases of Troia (from 1080), Bari (from 1075), Melfi, Monte St-Angelo, Candela, Fiorentino and Montecorvino.³¹⁵ In addition, throughout the second half of the eleventh century the vast open *civitates* of the Byzantine period were enclosed and the smaller fortified sites (*kastellia*) were modified to *castellum*, probably by strengthening the walls and building a small chateau or a *donjon*.³¹⁶ The contrast, however, between the building activity in the coastal areas close to Bari, Trani or Brindisi and the rest of the areas in the Apulian periphery, like the sensitive border areas with the Capitanata and the Lombard principalities is quite striking, exactly as it was taking place in the Welsh marches during the Conqueror's reign.³¹⁷ In general, there was no significant castle-building activity in the coastal areas, at least in the second half of the eleventh century, but in the same period the building of *castella* in the Apulian periphery multiplied.³¹⁸

The Norman fortifications in Sicily and Calabria

³¹⁴ Romuald of Salerno, s.a. 1022; Trinchera, *Syllabus*, n. 18; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. 62; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, p. 143.

³¹⁵ Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 272-77; idem, "Modalites", 99; the charter evidence are very few and scarce and in many cases some of the chateaux are mentioned in the texts quite late – even as late as the early thirteenth century. See: Martin, *La Pouille*, p. 274, n. 117; F. Nitti, *Le pergamene di S. Nicola di Bari, Periodo normanno (1075-1194)*, Bari, 1968, n. 1 (1075).

³¹⁶ For example, the seven *kastellia* surrounding Bari: Martin, "Modalites", 99, n. 88; *La Pouille*, pp. 277-82.

³¹⁷ Higham, Barker, *Timber Castles*, p. 46; compare with the Capitanata and the Apulian-Campanian marches: Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 278-82.

³¹⁸ Martin, "Modalites", 99.

What the Normans found in Calabria after 1056 was a very different situation from what they were about to face a few years later in Sicily.³¹⁹ From the most significant ports of Calabria like Reggio, Cariati and Rossano only the first was heavily fortified as the capital of Calabria, and in Rossano the Normans built a castle only in 1072.³²⁰ As for other major fortified cities, in the north of the Val di Crati there were Bisignano, Martirano and Cosenza, which were paying tribute to Guiscard already by the year 1056,³²¹ the cities of Nicastro and Maida which were taken in 1057,³²² Oppido,³²³ St-Martino,³²⁴ Mileto, Gerace and Squillace (1058-9).³²⁵ Unfortunately no details of their size are given by the chroniclers and Malaterra is quite vague or even silent when it comes to details about any renovations that might had taken place in these cities after the Norman arrival. Also, the prevailing idea amongst historians is that the *motte-and-bailey* type of fortifications became common in mainland Italy only at the end of the eleventh century, when castle-building spread more widely in a society affected by civil strife, although a small number of fortified sites built by wood can be seen as early as the late 1040s.³²⁶

³¹⁹ For the Calabrian fortifications, see: A. Bruschi, C., Miarelli-Mariani, *Architettura sveva nell'Italia meridionale*, Prato, 1975; J.M. Pesez, G. Noyé, "Archéologie normande en Italie méridionale et en Sicile", *Les mondes normands (VIIe-XIIIe siècles)*, Actes du IIe congrès International d'Archeologie Medievale, (Caen, 1978), Tours, 1990, 155-69; G. Noyé, "Quelque donnees sur les techniques de construction en Italie centro-meridionale, Xe-XIIIe siecle", *Artistes, artisans et production artistique au Moyen Age*, ed. X. Barral, Rennes, 1983, 275-306.

³²⁰ Malaterra, 3. 1.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 1. 17.

³²² *Ibid.*, 1. 18.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 1. 32.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1. 32, 2. 27.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1. 18, 36, 37, 2. 23, 24.

³²⁶ For the difficulties in supporting this idea based on archaeological facts, see: Higham, Barker, *Timber Castles*, pp. 78-9.

The two fortresses that were first established in Calabria by Guiscard's forces were Scribla and St-Marco Argentano. Both were built in the strategically important Val di Crati,³²⁷ during the first years of Guiscard's arrival in Italy (1047-8). St-Marco Argentano was built of timber,³²⁸ not surprisingly though if we consider Guiscard's economic status at the time and the abundance of timber in that particular area of Calabria. These first traces of earth and timber fortifications might resemble the Norman *motte-and-bailey* type, but as Malaterra tells us the Normans eventually abandoned the timber material in favour of the stone, as in Cosenza in 1091.³²⁹ Scribla on the other hand, should be considered as one of the most characteristic samples of Norman castle-building activity in Italy, built in a highly strategic place and, quite possibly, on a previous Byzantine defensive site.³³⁰ It is one of the earliest castles built by the Normans, thus it certainly bears great similarities to the castles of that period in Normandy and France. The castle was surrounded by a ditch and a double stone wall, and it is believed to have been reinforced by stone flanking towers, although the exact dating can be very difficult.³³¹ The stone tower (*donjon*) of Scribla was square-based and dominated the land-platform in the west side of the castle. It had four levels and it served both as a defensive site and a residential place.³³²

Conclusively, although Scribla suffered much destruction since the first period of the Norman occupation of the site, we are able to distinguish the Norman characteristics of that first period and compare them to the various influential elements imported from Sicily during

³²⁷ See the map for the Val di Crati in: A.-M. Flambard-Hericher, "Un Instrument de la conquete et du pouvoir: les chateaux normands de Calabre. L'exemple de Scribla", *Les Normandes en Mediterranee aux XIe-XIIe siecles*, 95.

³²⁸ Amatus, III. 7.

³²⁹ Malaterra, 4. 17.

³³⁰ Flambard-Hericher, "Un Instrument", 99; G. Noyé, "Problèmes poses par l'identification et l'étude des fosses-silos sur un cite d'Italie meridionale", *Archaeologia Medievale*, 8 (1981), 421-38.

³³¹ Flambard-Hericher, "Un Instrument", 100-101, 104.

³³² Compare with the Norman and French early stone castles, see: DeVries, *Medieval Military Technology*, pp. 218-25.

the second period of the occupation of the site after 1064. As in Sicily, but in a much lesser degree, the Normans were able to re-use the existing Byzantine fortifications or modify them with wooden superstructures. However, archaeological evidence points out that *motte-and-bailey* type of fortifications became wide-spread in Calabria only at the end of the eleventh century. As for the typical sample of early “Italian-Norman” castle architecture, a reconstructed flanking tower and donjon, along with traces of a primitive ditch and a stone curtain wall can be found in Scribla which is the earliest Norman castle in the Italian peninsula, dating in the mid-eleventh century.

What the Normans found in Sicily, after the 1060s, in terms of influence from other cultures, was quite unique for what they had dealt so far in Normandy and mainland Italy.³³³ Two completely different civilizations, the Byzantines and the Arabs, had left their mark in that part of the Mediterranean, both influenced by each other and about to influence the Sicilian Normans as well. Historians and archaeologists have come across three main types of fortified sites for the island of Sicily between the ninth and eleventh centuries.³³⁴ First were the highly crowded and heavily fortified ports, which also were the most important commercial centres of the island, like those of Palermo and Messina, or smaller ones like those of Termini, Cefalu, Girgenti and Syracuse. Second there were the well-defended cities situated in closed valleys, and if coastal usually in a certain distance from the coast due to security reasons,³³⁵ like Trapani, Mazara and Rametta. Third we had the *castra*, built in an isolated and naturally defended location, like Castrogiovanni which dominated a strategic crossroad of the island from the east to the west.

³³³ For the Sicilian fortifications, see: H. Besc, “Terre e castelli: le fortificazioni nella Sicilia araba e normanna”, *Castelli. Storia e archaeologia*, ed. R. Comba, A.A. Settia, Torino, 1984, 73-87; F. Maurici, *Castelli medievali in Sicilia. Dai bizantini ai normanni*, Palermo, 1992.

³³⁴ H. Besc, “Les Normands constructeurs de chateaux”, *Les Normandes en Mediterranee aux XIe-XIIE siecles*, ed. P. Bouet, F. Neveux, Presses Universitaires de Caen, Caen, 2001, 64-5; Besc, “Terre e castelli”, 73-4, 79.

³³⁵ Muslim pirate activities had pushed the inhabitants of Calabria further inland around the 960s.

In this last type of *castra*, we can find a great number of Byzantine highly fortified places which had to be overcome by the Arabs during their expansion and settlement in Sicily throughout the ninth century. And it was probably these Byzantine *castra* that served as a model for future Arab castle-building in the island. The list is filled with names, either Greek or Arab, like Castronuovo (831), Caltabellotta and Platani (840), Ragusa (848), Caltavuturo (852), Butera (854), Qasr al-Harir (857), Castrogiovanni (859), Noto (864) and Syracuse (878), to mention only a few of them.³³⁶ During the last quarter of the tenth century (around 990), the Arab geographer Muqaddasi lists around thirty names of fortified places, either newly built or reoccupied,³³⁷ while the number of fortified sites rose to around 90 after the “incastellamento” of the second half of the tenth century.³³⁸

Due to lack of sufficient numbers during the Sicilian expansion and to prevent any rebellious activities, the Normans inevitably demolished a number of smaller *castra*, although the exact figure would be impossible to estimate. But they were also quick to seize and modify either old abandoned or newly conquered ones, mostly by building overstructures and/or inner fortifications, something that proves once more their ability to adapt in the new environment. Consequently, the building activities of the Normans increased drastically in the 1060s-70s in places like Messina (1061),³³⁹ Troina (1062),³⁴⁰ Petralia (1066),³⁴¹ Palermo (1071),³⁴² Mazara and Paterno (1072),³⁴³ Mt. Calascibetta (1074),³⁴⁴ Trapani and Castronuovo (1077).³⁴⁵ In the Val di Mazara in the west we find twelve other names of

³³⁶ In the parentheses are the dates when these *castra* were captured by the Arabs: Maurici, *Castelli medievali in Sicilia*, p. 44; Bresc, “Terre e castelli”, 73.

³³⁷ Bresc, “Terre e castelli”, 78.

³³⁸ Bresc, “Terre e castelli”, 74-75; “Les Normands constructeurs de chateaux”, 65-66.

³³⁹ Malaterra, 2. 13.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 2. 20.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2. 38.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 2. 45; *Gesta*, III, 337-39, p. 182.

³⁴³ Malaterra, 3. 1.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3. 7.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 3. 11, 12.

castra, either conquered or newly constructed, which were given to milites by Roger,³⁴⁶ while in 1086 Malaterra talks about eleven *castra* that surrendered after the submission of Agrigento.³⁴⁷

Due to the repeated use of a number of fortified sites for many centuries, the archaeologists cannot confirm the building of any mottes in the island of Sicily.³⁴⁸ However, what we can observe in Sicily in the late eleventh century is the lack of need for earth and timber in the fortifications, although this would still probably be used in superstructures, and the turn to stone instead.³⁴⁹ But apart from the variety of new features that the Normans introduced in their “Sicilian” architecture, such as different kinds of ramparts,³⁵⁰ ditches – as I will repeat later on, ditches are rarely found in Byzantine fortifications – or baileys,³⁵¹ the Normans were greatly influenced by two categories of castra from previous historical periods; the Muslim palace of Calathamet, built during the reign of the Fatimid Caliph Al-

³⁴⁶ Besc, “Les Normands constructeurs de chateux”, 69; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 382-83; see also a comparison of the fortifications mentioned by Muqaddasi and those known to us in the period of the Norman settlement: Besc, “Terre e castelli”, 80.

³⁴⁷ Malaterra, 4. 5.

³⁴⁸ Besc, “Les Normands constructeurs de chateux”, 71.

³⁴⁹ At Trapani (1077): *urbem... castro et caeteris munitioibus ordinat, militibus et iis, quae necessaria erat, munit, turribus et propugnaculis undique uallans*, see: Malaterra, 3. 11; at Agrigento (1086): *urbem itaque pro uelle suo ordinans, castello firmissimo munit, uallo girat, turribus et propugnaculis ad defensionem aptat*, see: Ibid., 4. 5; at Petralia (1066): *turribus et propugnaculis extra portam accuratissime firmavit*, see: Ibid., 2. 38; Besc puts the *propugnaculis* of Petralia to a different category, see: Besc, “Les Normands constructeurs de chateux”, 72.

³⁵⁰ See the comparison of Messina, Palermo and Petralia: Maurici, *Castelli medievali in Sicilia*, p. 162; Besc, “Les Normands constructeurs de chateux”, 72.

³⁵¹ See the comparison of Monte San Giuliano and Castellammare del Golfo: Maurici, F., *Castelli medievali in Sicilia*, p. 162; Besc, “Les Normands constructeurs de chateux”, 72

Hakim (996-1020) in the predominantly Muslim Val di Mazara, and the Byzantine *kastrò* in Caronia, in the north-west of the Christian Val Demone.³⁵²

Finally, we can say that the originality or the success of the Norman administration in Sicily, which was based in western standards and was enriched with Byzantine and Arabic elements, was not a direct result of the Norman ingenuity but rather of the ability to adapt in the new environment and combine the existing knowledge that the Normans had carried from France with what they found in Sicily for their interest and necessities. An additional proof about this is the establishment of some sort of a “technical school”, or more precisely a corps of *studiosi magistrati*, who were brought to Messina “from all around” in 1082,³⁵³ a clear sign of the Norman desire to take advantage of the inherited knowledge.

³⁵² Bresc, “Les Normands constructeurs de chateaux”, 72-75; Jean-Marie Pesez, Jean-Michel Poisson, “Le Chateau du Castrum Sicilien de Calathamet (XIIe siecle)”, *Castelli. Storia e archaeologia*, ed. R. Comba, A.A. Settia, Torino, 1984, 63-72.

³⁵³ *Cui operi studiosos magistratus, qui operariis praeessent, statuit*, see: Malaterra, 3. 32.

4. The Byzantine Army of the tenth and eleventh centuries

The Byzantine Army has been an institution that was constantly evolving throughout its history. A worthy successor to the vast mechanism set up by the Romans, any detailed analysis of the structure of the Byzantine Army at any period of its eleven centuries history could be the work of a lifetime, let alone a single chapter of a thesis. But what is truly remarkable is the degree of adaptability that characterised the Byzantine Army as an institution, along with the open minded attitude of its officers and the tactics they applied in the battlefields. Certain military manuals like Maurice's *Strategicon*, Leo VI's *Tactica*, the *Praecepta Militaria* of Nicephoros Phocas, the *Taktika* of Nicephoros Ouranos and the *Στρατηγικόν* of Cecaumenos offer us a thorough look into the way the Byzantine officers were thinking and how they faced their enemies in each operational theatre. Already since the eighth century they had set up two distinct but mutually supportive mechanisms, the thematic armies which were clearly defensive in their role and whose main objective was to intercept and harass any invading army, while the tagmata were the clearly professional units trained to deliver the final blow to the enemy on a pitched battle. While presenting the necessary geo-political background of the period, the main objective of this chapter will be to present the structure and development of these two mechanisms, in so far as this relates to our period, while looking at the basic infantry and cavalry formations put to the field by the Byzantine

generals. This will provide the necessary background for an analysis of the Norman expeditions against Byzantine provinces in 1081-84 and 1107-8 and to understand the way in which the Imperial Army reacted to them. It will also give an idea of the basic changes that were taking place in the Byzantine Army's structure in the decades following the defeat at Matzikert (1071).

The basic argument is that the army that Alexius deployed against the Normans in 1108 was different in both structure and make up than that which Romanus IV Diogenes had gathered for his Turkish campaigns that culminated in Matzikert. The old thematic and tagmatic units, indigenous troops that formed the backbone of the army's structure for centuries were largely replaced by mercenaries, for reasons that will be mentioned but not analysed in depth, as this is not the focus of this research. As we will see in detail in the following chapters, Alexius Comnenus had to count on the hiring of large bodies of paid troops of any ethnic background for long-term military service, like the Varangian Guard (largely comprised of Anglo-Saxons after 1081), the German Nemitzoi and several Frankish regiments; there were also units from neighbouring client or allied states that were hired for short-term periods, usually a number of campaigns or a single campaigning season, like the Seljuks of Nicaea, the Patzinaks, the Cumans and the Venetians. And finally, there were some indigenous troops which were organised into battalions that resembled the old tagmatic structure and bore the name of their place of origin, like the Macedonians, the Thessalians and the Thracians who constituted a large part of Alexius' armies in 1081 and 1108. Thus, the present chapter that introduces the reader into the structure of the pre-Comnenian period has to be closely studied with the main chapters of this thesis in order to fully understand the fundamental structural differences between the tenth and early twelfth century Byzantine Army.

The establishment and development of the *Themata* from the Heraclian to the Macedonian dynasties (610-1025)

By the term themata we mean the peculiar provincial organization, prompted by the condition of the times, whose distinguishing feature was the concentration of both military and civil authority in the hands of the military governor (*strategos* – general) of each province.³⁵⁴ It was introduced in Asia Minor during the years of Constans II (641-668), successor of the great Heraclius (610-641),³⁵⁵ as a response to the Slavic and Persian threat of the period. It originally meant the military corps that were stationed in the newly-created provinces,³⁵⁶ and it was only later that it came to mean the actual province where the troops were stationed.³⁵⁷ The individual parts of this defensive mechanism were two; the native soldiers (*stratiotai*) who were settled into the frontier areas as “farmer-soldiers” in exchange for lands from the Imperial demesne.³⁵⁸ They were attached to the lands surrounding a specific fort, a military camp or an important town and these lands provided the economic means for the maintenance of themselves, their families and their military equipment. And the fundamental principle was that these military lands were inalienable and they remained in the possession of the same family as hereditary.³⁵⁹ The soldiers were recruited³⁶⁰ by the

³⁵⁴ A.A. Vasiliev, *History of the Byzantine Empire*, 2 vols., Madison, University of Wisconsin, 1928, vol. I, p. 275.

³⁵⁵ Treadgold very convincingly puts the period of the introduction of the themata in the East in the years 659-662, see: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 24-6; J. Haldon, “Military Service, Military Lands, and the Status of the Soldiers: Current Problems and Interpretations”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 47 (1993), 3-7; reprinted in *State Society in Byzantium*, Variorum, Aldershot, 1995.

³⁵⁶ *Θέμα* derives from the ancient Greek verb *τίθημι*, which means to settle down.

³⁵⁷ H. Ahrweiler, “Recherches sur l’administration de l’empire Byzantin aux IXe-XIe siècles”, *Bulletin de Correspondance hellénique*, 84 (1969), 1-109; reprinted in: *Etudes sur les structures administratives et sociales de Byzance*, Variorum, London, 1971.

³⁵⁸ These lands consisted of either an allotment from the Imperial estates or confiscation from landholders: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 171-3; idem, “The Military Lands and the Imperial Estates in the Middle Byzantine Empire”, *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 7 (1983), 619-31; M.F. Hendy, *Studies in the Byzantine Monetary Economy, c. 300-1450*, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 634-40.

³⁵⁹ Ahrweiler, “Recherches”, 11-12.

strategos of the thema and they were obliged to report for duty when their officers sent for them, either for defensive or offensive campaigns or for regular training.³⁶¹ As far as the primary sources let us know, there were no geographic limitations concerning their service or a time-limit of any kind. Apart from an irregular fixed pay (*ρόγα*) of a modest size, which varied, of course, throughout the centuries,³⁶² they also enjoyed exemption from a number of taxes.³⁶³ Although the military service for the soldiers was hereditary and non-personal, the most significant difference with the western-European knights was the absence of the *homage* and the *investiture* binding the two parts together. However, the western knight was of much higher status than a Byzantine thematic soldier who resembled more to the old Roman legionary.

For the first one and a half centuries, the themata were introduced only in Asia Minor, but as the Empire expanded throughout the ninth century, new themata were created stretching the power of the Emperor from Antioch to the Danube and Calabria in Italy. In addition, Emperor Theophilus (829-42) introduced the *cleisurae* around 840, military districts created to guard the mountain passes of the Taurus Mountains in Cilicia against the Arabs, usually dominated by a small fortress.³⁶⁴ John I (969-976) united the thirty small frontier themes of Asia Minor into three *ducatēs* (Chaldea, Mesopotamia, Antioch), with each duke's authority being superior to the local generals. With this new command structure John wished to create

³⁶⁰ For examples of forced conscription: Ahrweiler, "Recherches", 13; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 120.

³⁶¹ For the military training, see: E. McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth: Byzantine Warfare in the Tenth Century*, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, 1995, pp. 217-222.

³⁶² The soldiers received pay when they were called for military service outside their localities: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 118-157; *The Byzantine Revival: 780-842*, Stanford, 1988, pp. 349-51; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 121-23; N. Oikonomides, "Middle-Byzantine Provincial Recruits: Salary and Armament", *Byzantine Warfare*, ed. J. Haldon, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007, 151-166.

³⁶³ Ahrweiler, "Recherches", 6-8; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 121.

³⁶⁴ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 32, 69; Haldon believes that the *cleisurae* were established as early as the reign of Heraclius: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 114.

a protective curtain in the sensitive frontier zones of the Empire in the East and West. However, this move seriously affected the in-depth defensive capabilities of the Empire in the frontiers, with the strategy becoming more and more localised and able to respond to threats of equal status than large field armies.³⁶⁵ Finally, the question of numbers for the themata is a tough one indeed and I wish to avoid going into a detailed examination. As we might expect, the numbers varied significantly throughout the centuries but the trend of round and even numbers was to be found in all the themes of the Empire, at least in theory. Thus, there were the small 800-men strong *cleisurae* in the East, 1,000-men strong smaller themes like Nicopolis and Cephalonia, 2,000-men strong themes like Sicily and Hellas to the 10,000-men strong Thracasian theme.³⁶⁶

The *Tagmata* as the elite units of the Army

Constantine V's reign (741-775) is marked by one of the greatest military innovations of the Byzantine army's history, the introduction of the *tagmata* (τάγματα) or regiments.³⁶⁷ The fundamental distinction between the old thematic and the new tagmatic units is that the soldiers of the themata were "part-time" soldiers, or they represented a kind of peasant militia scattered in large numbers in the Byzantine countryside. The soldiers of the tagmata, however, were clearly professional, highly trained, experienced and very well equipped and paid. As opposed to their thematic counterparts, they were recruited by the themata close to the capital and equipped by the state.³⁶⁸ Constantine created six tagmata, the three senior of which were cavalry regiments named *Scholae*, *Excubitors* and *Watch*. Nicephorus I (802-11)

³⁶⁵ Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 90.

³⁶⁶ For more on the numbers of the themata: Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its Army*, pp. 43-86; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 67-106.

³⁶⁷ The exact date is unknown.

³⁶⁸ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 179-86; J. Haldon, "The Organisation and Support of an Expeditionary Force: Manpower and Logistics in the Middle Byzantine Period", *Byzantium at War (9th-12th Century)*, Εθνικό Ιδρυμα Ερευνών, Athens, 1997, 111-51.

created a fourth cavalry tagma, named *Hicanati*, while John I founded the cavalry tagma of the *Athanatoi* (Immortals) in the early years of his reign. The three junior tagmata were infantry regiments, with the *Numera* and *Walls* serving as garrison troops for the capital, while the *Optimates* manned the baggage train on a campaign. The commander of each tagma was called *domesticus* (δομέστιχος) who was assisted by a *topoteretes* (τοποτηρητής), with the domesticus of the Scholae appearing as the commander-in-chief of the Imperial army when the Emperor was not leading the campaign.

During the period of the *Epigonoι*, but mainly on the second half of the eleventh century, additional tagmata were created which are mentioned by contemporary chroniclers; the *omoethneis* (ομοεθνείς), the *stratilate* (στρατηλάται), the *esperioi arithmoi* (εσπέριοι αριθμοί), the *megathymoi* (μεγάθυμοι) and the *archodorouloi* (αρχοντόπουλοι), probably 2,000 men strong and stationed in the capital. These tagmata had already started to replace the original tagmata after the defeat at Matzikert, a period when we find less and less references to them by the contemporary chroniclers.³⁶⁹

Before the mid-tenth century the tagmata were stationed in the vicinity of the capital. During the reign of Romanus II (959-963), they were divided into eastern and western commands.³⁷⁰ This decision was taken after many decades of experience of the western and eastern armies in fighting different enemies in the Balkans and Asia Minor respectively. Detachments of the tagmata, however, were also sent to certain key frontier regions, like Macedonia and Illyria in the Balkans or Anatolikon and Armeniakon in Asia Minor, a clear sign of the Empire's offensive policy.³⁷¹ Before Romanus' reforms the three cavalry tagmata had 4,000 troops each and the three infantry tagmata had 2,000 men each, while after the reforms the numbers of the cavalrymen in the Scholae and the Excubitors increased by 2,000,

³⁶⁹ Ahrweiler, "Recherches", 28-9; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 117-8.

³⁷⁰ Ahrweiler, "Recherches", 25-6.

³⁷¹ These tagmatic sub-units formed an autonomous organization in the thematic structure and only in campaigning periods they were under the commands of the strategos. See: Ahrweiler, "Recherches", 31-2.

with each domesticus of the East and West having 3,000 at his disposal, while the Hicanati, Watch, and the Immortals retained their total of 4,000 troops each.³⁷²

The basic structural unit of both the thematic and tagmatic armies was the *bandum* of 200 men, retaining its numbers at least until the mid-tenth century.³⁷³ These banda of 200 men could easily be combined to form larger units, like the 1,000-men *drungus* (or taxiarchy) commanded by a drungarie (or taxiarch), which also was the minimum number of troops that each thema had, and the 4,000-men *turma* led by a turmarch. Although these numbers kept changing throughout the centuries, the basic principle of keeping the structural units of the army in round numbers remained the same. Another important structural unit, created by Leo VI in an effort to expand the cavalry, was the office called *tribune*, commanding 50 men. This seems of little importance, but if we read the *Praecepta Militaria* of the Emperor Nicephorus II, we will notice the use of the cavalry bandum, meaning a 50-men unit as part of a 200-men bandum.³⁷⁴

The rise of the landed aristocracy and the subsequent decline of the *themata*

Since the period of Leo VI's reign (886-912), the landed aristocracy of the provinces which had appeared in Asia Minor around the mid-eighth century had gathered an immense power in its hands. The fact that the backbone of the thematic organisation of the Empire, the small-holders, was rapidly being transformed to dependants³⁷⁵ (*πάροικοι*) of the landed

³⁷² Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 64-86, 113-5.

³⁷³ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 93-117; "The Army in the Works of Constantine Porphyrogenitus", pp. 77-162; *The Byzantine Revival, 780-842*, Stanford, 1988, pp. 27-9.

³⁷⁴ Leo raised the ratio between cavalry and infantry from a fifth to a quarter. See: "Praecepta Militaria", IV. 1-2, p. 38.

³⁷⁵ The term dependant (*πάροικος*) meant the man who either sold or willingly gave his land to a patron-aristocrat, and in exchange for his freedom, he "escaped" military service and the paying of state taxes.

aristocracy was first recognised as an immediate threat by Romanus I Lecapenus (920-44).³⁷⁶ However, the already established power of the landed aristocracy and the excessive taxation of the small-holdings which was a great burden for the stratiotai doomed the imperial legislation to almost complete failure.³⁷⁷

The proof of the rapidly rising power of the families of Anatolia was the two civil wars early in Basil II's reign (976-79, 986-89). The military aristocracy of Asia Minor, taking advantage of the Byzantine "Reconquest" which allowed them to greatly expand their lands and earn significant reputation, would not have easily given away its privileges to the legitimate representative of the Macedonian dynasty. Thus – according to Psellus' claims – Basil targeted the foundations of their power, meaning the control over their lands and consequently over the stratiotai as well, along with their important offices in the army and provincial administration (i.e. the rebel Bardas Scleros was *dux* of Mesopotamia).³⁷⁸ He not only revived the old legislation set by Romanus I and Constantine VII, but he further introduced the *allelengyon* (*αλληλέγγυον*), a law that made the "powerful" responsible for the paying of the outstanding taxes of the small-holders.³⁷⁹ Further, in order to deal with the

³⁷⁶ Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 272-4; *Quelques problemes d'histoire de la paysannerie byzantine*, Brussels, 1956; Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, vol. I, pp. 419-20; P. Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium from the origins to the Twelfth century. The Sources and the Problems*, Galway, 1979, pp. 85-115.

³⁷⁷ The Byzantine tax system was regressive, meaning that the richer you were the less taxes you had to pay. See: M. Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204*, Longman, London 1997, pp. 88-9.

³⁷⁸ C. Holmes, "Political Elites in the Reign of Basil II", *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. P. Magdalino, Brill, Leiden, 2003, 44-56; in the same volume: J.-C. Cheynet, "Basil II and Asia Minor", 76-79.

³⁷⁹ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 26-7; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 306-7; Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, vol. I, pp. 422-3; Holmes, "Political Elites", 35-69; the best arguments regarding the centralization of the Byzantine government in the last two decades of the tenth century can be found in: H. Ahrweiler, "Recherches sur la société byzantine au XIe siècle: nouvelles hierarchies et nouvelles solidarités", *Travaux et Memoires*, 6 (1976),

rebellious tendencies of the Armies of the East, he introduced the commuting of military service to allow him to hire mercenaries.³⁸⁰ This reform, however, was not regularised by the government until the mid-eleventh century.³⁸¹ It has also been suggested that even during the reign of Basil II several thematic units in Asia Minor were disbanded due to their poor performance, with the Emperor moving towards the “tagmatisation” of the themes.³⁸² The timing of the introduction of these measures was not a coincidence, in a period of intense military activity when Basil desperately needed the money to finance his Bulgarian wars which lasted up to the year 1018.

During the Epigonoi period, although the imperial power was controlled by the bureaucrats of the capital who wished to diminish the power of their antagonists in Asia Minor, no measures were taken to reverse the decline of the themata. Laws like the *allelegyon* and the *epibole* were revoked by Romanus III Argyros (1028-34)³⁸³ and the final blow came during the reign of Constantine IX (1042-55) with the introduction of the new ministry of *epi ton kriseon* (ἐπί των κρίσεων) under the office of the judge-praetor (πραιτωρ).³⁸⁴ This was the first office to be abolished by Alexius Comnenus in his struggle to reunite the civilian and military authorities of the provinces under the *duke-katepano*, who, in

99-124; and in the same volume: N. Oikonomides, “L’ evolution de l’ organisation administrative de l’ empire byzantine au XIe siècle”, 125-52.

³⁸⁰ The imperial government had begun asking money in return for military service since the first half of the tenth century. See: Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 138-9; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 124; idem, “Military Service”, 28; Lemerle, *The Agrarian History of Byzantium*, pp. 124-5.

³⁸¹ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 144-9.

³⁸² Cheynet, “Basil II and Asia Minor”, 82-88.

³⁸³ Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 322, 329.

³⁸⁴ After 1025 it had become common for the strategos’ authority to be limited to military matters, with the judge (πραιτωρ) of the thema being responsible for the thematic administration: Oikonomides, “L’ Evolution de l’organisation administrative”, 125-52; M. Angold, “Belle Epoque or Crisis? (1025-1118)”, *C.H.B.E.*, 598-601.

turn, would be under the unified command of the ministry – *logothesion of the stratotikon* (λογοθέσιο του στρατιωτικού).³⁸⁵

The collapse of the military institution of the themata was the result of the gradual erosion of its foundations, meaning the military lands and the “farmer-soldiers”. On the whole, the decrees issued by the Emperors of the tenth century, although can be considered as a significant effort to limit the powers of the great landholders of Asia Minor, accomplished very little, and even though they should have been strengthened and further enhanced by the successors of Basil II, they were abandoned and gradually forgotten. However, we cannot solely blame the Emperors of the eleventh century for the failure to act in favour of the small-holders because, as we saw, the latter’s transformation into dependants had already begun in the early tenth century. The change of policy which appeared to originate with the *Epigonoi* was in reality due to a development which was no longer possible to control, with only the final words in the “death certificate” of the themata being put by them. Fortunately for the Empire, the tagmatic units seemed to have suffered much less throughout the same period because their organization was not based on military lands but they were, as I mentioned earlier, paid and equipped by the central government. It was the economic crisis of the second half of the eleventh century that affected them more than any row between the Emperors and the provincial aristocracy.

The administrative-economic system of the *pronoia*³⁸⁶ can be seen as the innovative solution to two of the most pressing problems of Alexius’ reign, the disintegration of the

³⁸⁵ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 199, 203, 207-8; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 149-53.

³⁸⁶ For the introduction and development of the *pronoia*, see: Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 330-1, 370-1; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire, 1025-1204*, pp. 148-9; Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 211-222; P. Magdalino, “The Byzantine Army and the land: from stratotikon ktema to military *pronoia*”, *Byzantium at War, (9th-12th C.)*, 32-6; T. Maniati-Kokkini, “Μία πρώτη προσέγγιση στη μελέτη του βυζαντινού θεσμού της πρόνοιας: οι προνοιάριοι”, *Ελληνική Ιστορική Εταιρεία. Θ’ Πανελλήνιο Ιστορικό Συνέδριο, Μάιος 1988*, Thessaloniki, 1988, 49-60.

army and the collapsing economy. The *pronoia* was the piece of land handed over from the imperial demesne to imperial favourites³⁸⁷ to administer (*εις πρόνοιαν*), and during the reign of the Comneni the grantee of a *pronoia* had to offer military service to the state in exchange for that land. Having inherited an economy with no reserves of money in the Imperial Treasury, a debased coinage and a large army of mercenaries from the Balkans and Western Europe, the system of distributing *pronoiai* in return for military service, a system which much resembled western feudalism,³⁸⁸ seemed to be an answer to the pressing needs for more troops that Alexius was facing. But it only had short-term effects and it was not developed at a great scale. It was after the 1090s that Alexius had the time and the resources to finance the revival of a strong and centralised land and naval armies that would give him the opportunity to recover imperial territories in the Asia Minor and the Balkans.

Introduction to the Byzantine Infantry of the Conquest and its basic battle formations

Before we begin our analyses of the structure and battle tactics of the Byzantine Army of the tenth century, we have to underline the fact that our most detailed primary source for this task that is also closer, chronologically, to the Comnenian period is the *Praecepta Militaria*, a military manual attributed to the Emperor Nicephoros II Phocas (963-69) that contains useful advice based on experience in fighting the Muslims in Syria in the first years of the “Reconquest”. However, it is beyond any doubt that the structure, consistency and tactics of the Byzantine Army would have evolved during the *Epigonoι* period, but to what extent we cannot be sure. The *Praecepta* and the rest of the handbooks of the period set rather strict guidelines, but they allowed the commander a great deal of discretion in the field. They reflect the practice of older and well-established strategies and tactics, along with a number of

³⁸⁷ The *pronoiarıoi* usually came from the lower levels of the provincial aristocracy, contrary to the old *stratiotai* of the *themata* who were mere farmers.

³⁸⁸ For this debate, see: J. Haldon, “The feudalism debate once more: the case of Byzantium”, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 17/1 (1989), 5-40; reprinted in *State Society in Byzantium*.

innovative ideas put to practice, and the task of the historian is to distinguish between the two. As the author of the late tenth century Byzantine treatise *On Skirmishing* notes: “We have acquired this knowledge not simply from hearing about it [from the old military manuals] but also from having been taught by a certain amount of experience.”³⁸⁹

Another point that has to be mentioned is the consistency of the Imperial Army. When we are referring to the Byzantine Empire as a predominately Greek Empire, we are making the same mistake as thinking of the 1914 Habsburg Empire as Austrian or the Empire of Queen Victoria as British. Thus, one of the major contributing factors to the adaptability of the Byzantine Army throughout the centuries was its ability to effectively incorporate several ethnic groups into its ranks. As we will see, numerous peoples like Kurds, Christian Arabs (the Khurramites, the Mardaites, and the Maronites of today’s Lebanon), Vlachs, Armenians, Bulgars, Slavs, Rus and Illyrians (Albanians) were recruited in the army, either as individuals or in larger groups.³⁹⁰ Discipline was the rule among ethnically diverse units of the Byzantine army, although exceptions were noted by chroniclers, like the suspicion which many times developed to open hatred of the Byzantines for the heretic Paulicians.

The Byzantine infantry of the tenth century was divided into heavy and light infantry units, with the consistency of an infantry 1,000-men *drungus* being 400 infantrymen (*οπλίται*), 300 archers (*τοξόται*), 200 javeliners and slingers and a hundred *menavlatoi*.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ “On Skirmishing”, 13-15, p. 146.

³⁹⁰ Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 163-75.

³⁹¹ “Praecepta Militaria”, I. 75-84, p. 16; for the equipment of the infantry, see: T.G. Kollias, *Byzantinische Waffen. Ein Beitrag zur byzantinischen Waffenkunde von den Anfängen bis zur lateinischen Eroberung*, Vienna, 1988; idem, “Η Πολεμική Τεχνολογία των Βυζαντινών”, [The Military Technology of the Byzantines], *Επιστημονική επετηρίδα του Τμήματος Ιστορίας και Αρχαιολογίας του Πανεπιστημίου Ιωαννίνων*, 18 (1989), 17-41; J.F. Haldon, “Some Aspects of the Byzantine Military Technology from the Sixth to the Tenth Centuries”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 1 (1975), 30-47; T. Dawson, “Syntagma Hoplon: The Equipment of Regular Byzantine Troops, c. 950 to c. 1204”, *A Companion to Medieval Arms and Armour*, ed. D. Nicolle, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2002, 81-90; idem, “Kremasmata, kabadion, klibanion: some aspects of middle Byzantine military equipment reconsidered”,

“The formation of the infantrymen under discussion is to be a double-ribbed square, thus called “a four-sided formation” by the ancients, which has three units on each side so that all together there are twelve units on the four sides. In case the cavalry force is quite large and the enemy does not bring along a similar number of infantry, twelve intervals should be left open. If, on the other hand, the cavalry force is not large and the enemy does bring infantry along, eight intervals should be left open.”³⁹² The basic infantry formation was a quadrilateral one which had small intervals on each of the four sides, and depending on the numbers of cavalry and their ratio with the infantry units, along with other significant factors like the terrain and the composition of the enemy’s units, could either form a square – thus having two intervals on each side – or a rectangle – with three intervals on the front and two on the flanks. Variations depending on the nature of the terrain and the deployment of the troops – either broad or narrow front – are also mentioned.³⁹³ However, we have to underline the fact that this formation is relatively recent in the history of Byzantine warfare. Although square formations existed since ancient times, this particular hollow square where the cavalry could take refuge and regroup is first mentioned by Nicephoros Phocas and can be attributed – with the necessary caution – to the defensive frontier wars in Cilicia in the second quarter of the tenth century under John Curcuas.³⁹⁴ Thus, another sign of Byzantine adaptability to the Arab encircling manoeuvres experienced in this period.

Nicephoros also uses the term unit (*παράταξις*), identifying the basic structural unit of the *drungus*. But what was the deployment of each men of a *drungus*? “The heavy infantrymen must be deployed two deep in a double-faced formation, and keep two infantrymen in front and two in the back. Between them are three light archers, so that the depth of the formation

Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 22 (1998), 38-50; I have not had the chance to look at: A.B. Hoffmeyer, *Military Equipment in the Byzantine Manuscript of Scylitzes in Biblioteca National in Madrid*, Granada, 1966.

³⁹²“Praecepta Militaria”, I. 39-51 p. 14; compare with: “On Strategy”, 15. 1-117, pp. 46-52.

³⁹³ “Praecepta Militaria”, II. 151-175, pp. 30-2.

³⁹⁴ McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon’s Teeth*, pp. 257-65; M. Bennett, “The Crusaders’ ‘Fighting March’ Revisited”, *War in History*, 8 (2001), 5-11.

is seven men.”³⁹⁵ Thus the *οπλίται* and the *τοξόται* stood seven lines deep and a hundred across. Acknowledging the fact that the intervals on each side of the square formation presented a weak point to the whole square formation, the 200 javeliners and slingers were deployed to guard these points, positioned alongside the last two lines of the infantrymen.³⁹⁶ The remaining 100 *menavlatoi*, the elite spearmen of the infantry, were to take their place in front of the *οπλίται*, thus raising the depth of the taxiarchy’s formation to eight men.³⁹⁷

Thus, what we understand from Nicephoros’ description of the infantry formation is their defensive role in the battlefield and the predominance of the cavalry in all major pitched battles of the period. Both according to the *Tactica* and the *Praecepta*,³⁹⁸ when a mixed formation of cavalry and infantry was facing an enemy force in battle, the general should put his foot-soldiers at one or two bow-shots distance behind the cavalry, so that his horsemen would seek shelter to rest and regroup inside the infantry square formation.³⁹⁹ The role of the infantry, especially in mixed units with cavalry forces, will be further examined and compared with the Norman and Frankish deployment when in joint action with their knights, as seen in the battles of Hastings (1066), Dyrrachium (1081) and throughout the First Crusade.

The role of the infantry units of the Byzantine Army, as seen in the *Praecepta Militaria* written in a period of intense military activity and expansionist policy in Asia Minor and the Balkans, reflects the need of the Empire for professional soldiers to be deployed alongside elite tagmatic cavalry units with discipline, high morale and excellent training being paramount. This, however, comes as a sharp contrast to the view of foot soldiers before that period. From the establishment of the *themata* and their *stratiotai* in the mid-seventh century up to the mid-tenth century the Empire was on the defensive against its enemies both in the

³⁹⁵ “*Praecepta Militaria*”, I. 62-65, p. 16.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I. 89-94, p. 16.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, I. 94-95, pp. 16-18.

³⁹⁸ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XIV. 20; Nicephoros implies that the cavalry would be posted in front of the infantry units when describing the latter’s square formation as refuge for the former.

³⁹⁹ See the figure 6.3 in: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 221.

Balkans and Asia Minor – with only some short breaks – and the nature of the missions undertaken by infantry soldiers was mainly the manning of strategic towns, forts and outposts and a kind of frontier guerrilla warfare. Thus the notion of the foot-soldiers of the pre-Conquest period as relatively undisciplined, poorly trained peasant militias whose role in warfare was overshadowed by the heavy cavalry – a situation that the generals of the tenth century desperately tried to change. We have to bear in mind that the reading of the *Praecepta* and the rest of the military treatises of the period of the “Reconquest”, although they provide valuable information about equipment and battle tactics, they may give us a false idea about the status of these units and the general strategic role played by foot-soldiers in the battlefields of the period of the *Epigonoι* when we return to somewhat pre-Conquest tactics. Although they still played an integral part in the defence of the Empire’s borders, the decline of the themata, the economic crisis in the middle of the century which resulted to budget cuts, the fiscalization of the military service and the increasing employment of mercenaries – indigenous or foreigners – seriously undermined their overall battlefield effectiveness by the second half of the eleventh century and especially in Alexius Comnenus’ 1081-83 campaigns as I will examine in detail.⁴⁰⁰

Introduction into the Byzantine cavalry of the Conquest and its basic battle formations

In the period of the *Tactica* and the *Praecepta* we can say with certainty that the cavalry – and especially the elite tagmatic units – dominated the battlefields of the Balkans and Asia Minor and their use sometimes overshadowed even the mentioning of any provincial foot-soldiers from the contemporary primary sources. The three major types of cavalymen were the prokoursatores, the thematic levies and the heavily armed tagmatic troops (*kataphraktoi* or *κατάφρακτοι*). The prokoursatores was a reconnaissance unit of lightly armed cavalry numbering 500 men – 110-120 would have been horse archers and the rest were lancers. The

⁴⁰⁰ Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 197-228.

regular cavalry of the themata was wearing sleeve-less waist-length cuirass or waist-length mail shirt – similar to the prokoursatores, along with conic-shaped iron helmets and round, oval or kite-shaped wooden shields.⁴⁰¹ Although they had swords, it is specifically noted in the *Praecepta* that they either fought as lancers or as mounted archers (with a ratio of 3:2).⁴⁰²

The kataphraktoi were by far the most elite unit of the Byzantine army when it comes to training, experience and, of course, equipment. Nicephoros' *Praecepta*, along with the famous graffito of a third century *klibanarius* from Dura Europos⁴⁰³, gives us a good idea of the defensive⁴⁰⁴ and offensive equipment of a kataphraktos. Each cavalryman was wearing a *klibanion*,⁴⁰⁵ a short-sleeved, waist-length cuirass of lamellar, supplemented by extra cuirass sleeves, while their arms and forearms were protected by thick gauntlets (*μανικέλια*). Under the *klibanion* there was the *zabai* (*ζάβαι*), which usually meant sections of chain mail, or plates of leather, supplemented by the *kremasmata* (*κρεμάσματα*) which were the skirt-like coverings of the area from the waist to the knees.⁴⁰⁶ Their heads were protected by iron helmets with additional two or three layers thick *zabai*. The kataphract's main combat weapon was the iron mace, while a second weapon was the *παραμήριον*, a type of single-

⁴⁰¹ "Praecepta Militaria", IV. 7-11, 36-39, pp. 38-40; Dawson, "Syntagma Hoplon", 87-8; "Kremasmata, kabadion, klibanion", 38-50; Haldon, "Byzantine Military Technology", 30-47; Kollias, *Waffen*, pp. 88-131; for the introduction of the kite-shaped shield in European history by the Byzantine cavalry and infantry soldiers many centuries before they appeared in the hands of the Normans, see: Kollias, "Η Πολεμική Τεχνολογία των Βυζαντινών", 29-30.

⁴⁰² "Praecepta Militaria", IV. 35-6, p. 40.

⁴⁰³ For Dura-Europos, see the classic studies: M.I. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1938; R. Ghirshman, *Iran: Parthians and Sassanians*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1962.

⁴⁰⁴ "Praecepta Militaria", III. 26-37, pp. 34-6.

⁴⁰⁵ The *klibanion* was worn by the Sassanids as an outer defence of a heavy cavalryman as early as the fourth century. It is first mentioned by the *De Ceremoniis* (first half of ninth century) regarding the equipment of Byzantine cavalry forces and had probably passed to the Byzantines about a century earlier: Haldon, "Byzantine Military Technology", 27.

⁴⁰⁶ McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp. 69-70, 215-6; T.G. Kollias, "Ζάβα, ζαβάρετον, ζαβαρειώτης", *Jahrbuch der Osterreichischen Byzantinistik*, 29 (1980), 27-35.

edged curved sword of Avar influence. An extra sword is being described as a *σπαθίον* (a double-edged sword for a hand-to-hand combat carried over the left shoulder).⁴⁰⁷

The numbers of kataphraktoi serving in the Byzantine army must have been low, simply because acquiring and maintaining such equipment must have been difficult for the state's budget. For that reason their formations had to be supplemented by mounted archers and lancers numbering perhaps even more than half of a single 504-men strong cavalry unit.⁴⁰⁸ These elite soldiers had disappeared by the time of the Norman invasion in 1081, because the last time the term kataphraktos is mentioned in our sources is the *Taktika* of Nicephoros Ouranos. It seems possible that after the stabilization of the Empire's frontiers in the 1020s-30s they may have fallen under strength and stood down in the middle of the century.⁴⁰⁹

The *Praecepta* give direct instructions concerning the cavalry's formation.⁴¹⁰ The first of the total three lines of the cavalry force had three units, two of them consisting of light cavalymen and the middle one of kataphraktoi. The two light cavalry units had a total force of 500 men in five lines, with the basic structural unit being the 50-men *bandum*. These two units should have consisted of 300 mounted lancers and 200 archers, in a double-faced formation "for a possible attack from the rear."⁴¹¹ The third unit consisted of the kataphraktoi in their triangular formation⁴¹² and a full complement of 504 men.⁴¹³ Supplementing the first

⁴⁰⁷ "Praecepta Militaria", III. 53-60, p. 36; J. Howard-Johnston, "Studies in the Organization of the Byzantine Army in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries", unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Oxford University, 1971, 286-90; Haldon, "Byzantine Military Technology", 31; for an analysis of the terms *παραμήριον* and *σπαθίον*, see: McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp. 70, 217.

⁴⁰⁸ "Praecepta Militaria", III. 50-53, 69-70, pp. 36-38.

⁴⁰⁹ Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 223.

⁴¹⁰ "Praecepta Militaria", IV. 24-26, p. 40; compare with: "On Strategy", 17, 18, pp. 56-60.

⁴¹¹ Compare with: *Strategicon*, II. 4, p. 26.

⁴¹² "Praecepta Militaria", III. 1-24, 50-53, 60-65, pp. 34, 36; for the triangular formation and its origin from the old Scythian cavalry wedge (*έμβολον*), see: A. Hyland, *Training the Roman Cavalry: from Arian's Ars Tactica*, Grange, London, 1993.

⁴¹³ "Praecepta Militaria", IV. 47-50, p. 40.

line of the cavalry formation were the units of the outflankers (*υπερκερασται*) and the flankguards (*αποσοβήται*), each having two 50-men banda of both mounted archers and lancers. Finally, Nicephoros notes that the first line of the cavalry formation should be supported by another two lines, at a “bow-shot” distance, consisting of four and three units of light cavalry respectively.⁴¹⁴ Galloping ahead of the outflankers and flankguards were the *prokoursatores*.

But what caused the addition of a third line of cavalry as rearguard in the first half of the tenth century and what does that tell us about the adaptability of the Byzantine military thinking? Since the late Roman period, as seen through the *Strategicon* and the *Tactica*, the deployment of a cavalry force in the battlefield was taking place in two parallel lines of three and four units respectively.⁴¹⁵ It is in the *Praecepta* that we read for the first time about a third line of three units that should be added as a rear-guard to deal with the encircling tactics of the Bedouin auxiliaries of the Hamdanid armies (*Arabitai*),⁴¹⁶ which are clearly distinguished from the main Muslim body of the *Agarenoi* (*Αγαρηνοί*).⁴¹⁷ This third line is specifically identified with its Arabic name – *saqat*,⁴¹⁸ which is also described by an early ninth century Abbasid tactician called al-Harthami,⁴¹⁹ and is a striking reminder of the addition of the second line of cavalry (rear-guard) that we read in the sixth century

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., IV. 52-56, 65-67, 69, p. 42.

⁴¹⁵ *Strategicon*, II. 1, pp. 23-5; Leo VI, *Tactica*, XII, XVIII.

⁴¹⁶ For the best accounts on the organization, consistency and battle tactics employed by the Hamdanids and Fatimids see: McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp. 225-46; Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. II, pp. 19-193; B.J. Beshir, “Fatimid Military Organization”, *Der Islam*, 55 (1978), 37-56; W.J Hamblin, “The Fatimid Army during the Early Crusades”, D.Phil. thesis, University of Michigan, 1985; Y. Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, Brill, Leiden, 1991; *War and society in the eastern Mediterranean, 7th-15th centuries*, Brill, Leiden, 1997; “Infantry in Muslim armies during the Crusades”, *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades*, ed. J. H. Pryor, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, 185-206.

⁴¹⁷ “Praecepta Militaria”, II. 101-110, p. 28; Leo VI, *Tactica*, XX. 59.

⁴¹⁸ A. Dain, “Saka dans les traites militaires”, *Byzantion*, 44 (1951), 94-6.

⁴¹⁹ Ansari, Umar Ibn Ibrahim al-Awsi al-, *A Muslim Manual of War: being Tafrij al Kurub fi Tadbir al Hurub*, ed. and tr. by G.T. Scanlon, Cairo, 1961, p. 90.

Strategikon.⁴²⁰ Further, the corps of the *prokoursatores* is introduced in this period (mid-tenth century). This unit is first mentioned by the Byzantine treatise *On Skirmishing*, attributed probably to Nicephoros Phocas' elder brother Leo and composed sometime between the 965 and 971, as the unit of the *trapezitai* or *tasinarioi*.⁴²¹ Nicephoros, however, greatly expanded his analysis of the use of this unit during a campaign and the fact that this unit is established in the middle of the tenth century and its role in the battlefield is very similar to the Bedouin units of the Arab armies is another indication of the Arab influence on the Byzantine armies of the period.

The importance of stratagems, bribery and other “unchivalric” measures for the Byzantine strategic thought - How were they employed against the “Franks”?

In this chapter, a question that is easily raised is what was the difference between the military feeling in the East and West, during the period of the Middle Ages, or in other words, how did the Byzantine officer view war? The great difference between East and West was, indeed, the chivalric ideas of fair and honourable battle that dominated the latter,⁴²² but was considered somehow impractical in the East. In brief, the Byzantine officer was a clear professional who saw a battle as the chance to achieve his objective using every means possible, fair or unfair, chivalric or unchivalric.⁴²³ Military manuals like the *Strategikon*, the

⁴²⁰ The addition of the second line of cavalry came as a result of the encircling tactics applied by the Huns and the Avars: *Strategikon*, II. 1, pp. 23-24.

⁴²¹ “On Skirmishing”, II. 23-25, p. 152.

⁴²² Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 54-57; Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 236-7; for an introduction into the idea of chivalry, see: M. Keen, *Chivalry*, Yale University Press, London, 2005, pp. 1-18; S. Painter, *French chivalry, chivalric ideas and practices in mediaeval France*, Oxford University Press, London, 1940.

⁴²³ Oman, *The Art of War*, v. I, p. 201. Oman's old-fashioned view has been revised by modern scholars: W. Treadgold, “Byzantium, The Reluctant Warrior”, *Noble Ideas and Bloody Realities*, ed. N. Christie, M. Yazigi, Brill, Leiden, 2006, 209-33; W. E. Kaegi, “Some thoughts on Byzantine Military Strategy”, *The Hellenic Studies Lecture*, Hellenic College

Tactica and the *Στρατηγικόν* of Cecaumenos, all praise the use of several stratagems to deceive the enemy and bring back the army with as few casualties as possible, considering it absurd to lose experienced soldiers and money to draw a campaign to a violent and uncertain end. The Byzantine mentality can be summarized in a small paragraph written by Cecaumenos: “If you learn that your enemy’s general is prudent, be aware of his machinations and tricks. And yourself think of the same, and not only what old tricks you have learned and heard of from older people, but think of new ones, because the human nature has an innate wisdom as well as craftiness.”⁴²⁴

But we must ask ourselves why these manuals praise the use of fraud and deception to win a battle? It all comes down to Byzantium’s geographical position and its economic situation! The Empire throughout its history was doomed to fighting in two operational theatres, the Balkans (including Italy and Sicily) and eastern Asia Minor, and the Emperors had to allocate their limited resources in money and manpower in the most effective way, thus very rarely being able to afford any “unnecessary” losses! More so if we take into account that the State’s agricultural economy was barely able to support the paying of soldiers: “The financial system ... is principally concerned with paying the soldiers. Each year, most of the public revenues are spent for this purpose.”⁴²⁵ And due to the fact that these manuals were written in a period when the Empire was on the defensive struggling to keep or, to put it more vividly, to lose as fewer lands as possible in the Balkans and Asia Minor, we can understand the Byzantine reluctance to fight a pitched battle unless it was of utmost need. The *Strategicon* was written in the 570s, a period when Spain, Africa and Italy were viciously attacked by Visigoths, Berbers and Lombards respectively. More than three centuries later, the compilation of the *Tactica* coincided with Leo VI’s struggle with Symeon of Bulgaria (893-927) and the Arab advances in Cilicia and Armenia. And although tactical offensive did

Press, Brookline MA, 1983, 1-18; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 34-46; G. T. Dennis, “The Byzantines in Battle”, *Byzantium at War (9th-12th c.)*, 165-78.

⁴²⁴ Cecaumenos, p. 13.

⁴²⁵ “On Strategy”, 2. 18-21, pp. 12-13.

occur, this was only to preserve or retrieve lost grounds and it does not resemble with Justinian's expansionist wars or the period of the "Reconquest".

Let's proceed to give a detailed account of what a late ninth century officer was advised to do instead of engage his enemy on a pitched battle. According to Leo:

"You should not endanger yourself and your army if it is not of utmost need or if you are not to have major gains. Because these people who do this, they greatly resemble those who have been deceived by gold."⁴²⁶

"It is good if your enemies are harmed either by deception or raids, or by famine; and continue to harass them more and more, but do not challenge them in open war, because luck plays as a major role as valour in battle."⁴²⁷

To compare these aforementioned comments with a late eleventh century work (1075-78), Cecaumenos writes in his *Στρατηγικόν*:

"And only when you know everything about your enemy, only then you must stand and fight them, but do not let your army perish for no reason. Fight in such a way by applying tricks and machinations and ambushes to humiliate your enemy, and only when it is the last choice of all, and in the utmost need, only then stand and fight."⁴²⁸

Leo VI and Maurice add three "ancient" tricks to apply against an enemy:

⁴²⁶ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XX. 36.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, XX. 51.

⁴²⁸ Cecaumenos, pp. 9-10.

“You should fill your enemies with suspicion of treason from within, by sending false letters to high officers and making sure that your messengers are intercepted by them.”⁴²⁹

“You should raise discord and suspicion amongst the high-ranking officers of the enemy by deliberately sparing their houses, lands and villages while pillaging the enemy lands, and also send to them letters of friendship.”⁴³⁰

“Some commanders have welcomed embassies from the enemy and replied in gentle and flattering terms, sent them on their way with honours, and then immediately followed along and attacked them unexpectedly.”⁴³¹

All of the aforementioned principles agree with the dictates of the late Roman author Flavius Vegetius Renatus who wrote the single most important theoretical work on warfare available to medieval commanders, between the years 383 and 450, even though we do not know if the writings of Vegetius were known to Byzantine commanders or not:

“For good generals do not attack in open battle where the danger is mutual, but do it always from a hidden position, so as to kill or at least terrorize the enemy while their own men are unharmed as far as possible.”⁴³²

“It is preferable to subdue an enemy by famine, raids and terror, than in battle where fortune tends to have more influence than bravery.”⁴³³

⁴²⁹ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XX. 29.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, XX. 22, 161.

⁴³¹ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XX. 24; *Strategicon*, IX. 1, p. 93; Maniaces applied this trick against 800 Arabs at Teluch, in 1030: Skylitzes, II, p. 494.

⁴³² Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, III. 9, pp. 83-84.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, III. 26, p. 116.

And for purposes of comparison and to highlight the continuity of these basic principles, it is worth mentioning the writings of Sun Zu (c. 500 BC):

“A skilful leader subdues the units of an enemy without offering a battle. He conquers his [enemy’s] cities without laying siege on them. He conquers his kingdom without long-term military operations.”⁴³⁴

“A winner will be the general who knows when to fight and when to avoid giving a battle.”

However, these already “ancient” tricks of bribing the enemies, sending of spies to bring back important information on enemy morale and numbers, along with the sending of “friendly” letters to the enemy officers would seem rather up-to-date in Alexius’ dealing with the Norman invasion of 1107. We read in the *Alexiad*’s thirteenth book: “The general (I think) should not invariably seek victory by drawing the sword; there are times when he should be prepared to use finesse ... and so achieve a complete triumph. So far as we know, a general’s supreme task is to win, not merely by force of arms, sometimes, when the chance offers itself, an enemy can be beaten by fraud.”⁴³⁵

Setting aside the morality of the aforementioned stratagems, in what way were they employed against the various enemies of the Empire, and specifically the Franks? What did the Byzantines know about their enemies’ tactics and the ways to combat them? The *Tactica* of Emperor Leo VI serve as a key study to the entire military thinking of a Byzantine high-ranking officer, devoting an entire chapter on how to combat the Byzantine enemies. In this chapter of my thesis, my research will be focused solely on the Franks,⁴³⁶ not being carried away by the fascinating but very different military tactics employed against the Arabs in Asia

⁴³⁴ Sun Zu, *The Art of War*, tr. Lionel Jails, tr. in Greek by K. Georgantas, Greek edition, Vania, Thessaloniki, 1998, III. 6, 17a, pp. 31-32.

⁴³⁵ *Alexiad*, XIII. iv, vol. II, pp. 194-5; Sewter, p. 405.

⁴³⁶ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XVIII.

Minor. Also, for purposes of comparison, I will point out any similarities between Leo's writings and Maurice's eleventh book of the "Characteristics and Tactics of Various Peoples."⁴³⁷

Three centuries after the compilation of the *Strategicon*, we have an examination of the Frankish warrior of the post-Carolingian period, in Leo's eighteenth chapter of his *Tactica*, "For the study of several national and Roman battle arrays". We read:

The Franks and the Lombards are bold and daring to excess, they regard the smallest movement to the rear as a disgrace. So formidable is their charge with their broadsword, lance and shield, that it is best to decline a pitched battle with them till you have put all the chances on your side. You should take advantage of their indiscipline and disorder; whether fighting on foot or on horseback, they charge in dense, unwieldy masses, which cannot manoeuvre, because they have neither organisation nor drill. Nothing succeeds better against them than a feigned flight, which draws them into an ambush; for they follow hastily, and invariably fall into the snare. They are impatient of hunger and thirst, and after a few days of privation they desert their standards and return home as best as they can. Nor are their chiefs above the temptation of taking bribes; a moderate sum of money will frustrate one of their expeditions. On the whole, therefore, it is easier and less costly to wear out a Frankish army by skirmishes, protracted operations in desolate districts, and the cutting off of its supplies, than to attempt to destroy it at a single blow.⁴³⁸

The *Tactica* is the most detailed and most recent – to the Norman invasion of 1081 – examination of the Frankish military tactics. But even though Maurice describes the infantry armies of the early Merovingian period and Leo talks about the Frankish chivalry in the early stages of the development of the feudal cavalry, we can find some common features in both works. Something that can be easily taken out is the mentioning of the bravery of the

⁴³⁷ *Strategicon*, XI. 3, pp. 119-20.

⁴³⁸ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XVIII. 80-98.

Frankish soldiery, with special attention being paid to the chivalric nobility of the post-Carolingian era. Maurice calls them daring and impetuous, as if they are the only people in the world who are not cowards. However, this courage and stubbornness was to be their downfall because both authors strongly encourage the Byzantine general not to confront them in a pitched battle but rather resort to guerrilla tactics and stratagems. Leo also placed much attention to the Frankish battle-charges with specific mentioning on how undisciplined a Frankish attack is, with the Franks attacking in dense cavalry masses that could not manoeuvre easily in the battle-field. However, this weakness of the Frankish armies is debatable and the fact that they were fighting in one single battle could simply had been viewed that way by the observers.⁴³⁹ Also, we know that in Charlemagne's period the men who had joined the royal army coming from the provinces were forming their own contingent, so it is quite likely that they also fought in the same formations.⁴⁴⁰ Finally, another element of the Frankish warrior that was again taken out and used against them was their "greedy and easily corrupted nature" that would turn the soldiers against their officers, and the officers against their generals and kings.

Thus, according to the *Tactica*, in order to sustain a heavy cavalry attack from the elite Frankish chivalry, the best thing was to avoid battle at all costs until all the chances were in the general's favour. If he could not avoid battle, he should use the feigned flight tactics that could draw the Franks into an ambush or attack their unprotected flanks. He should take advantage of the terrain and the weather conditions and impose a land-blockade that would lead to a shortage of food, water and – most importantly – wine, flaring up discontent amongst the soldiers. Finally, a Frankish campaign could easily be brought to an end by bribing the enemy officers with a "moderate" amount of money. In any case, Leo considers the giving of a pitched battle against the Franks as the last and desperate solution that should be avoided at all costs. In Italy, the Byzantines followed Leo's strategy of avoiding battle only after the three consecutive defeats of 1041 and the failed Sicilian expedition of 1038-41.

⁴³⁹ J.F. Verbruggen, *L' armee et la strategie de Charlemagne*, Dusseldorf, 1965.

⁴⁴⁰ Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, pp. 22-29; Oman, *The Art of War*, v. I, pp. 84-88.

The deeper reasons behind this lies in the fact that Longobardia was a secondary operational theatre compared to Asia Minor or the Balkans, and after the 1050s no significant reinforcements could be spared to that distant province. Thus, all the Catepans could do was to use the heavily fortified Apulian landscape to their favour and deny battle from the Normans.

The geopolitical instability of the period of the *Epigonoï* (1025-71) – The battles at Matzikert (1071) and Kalavrye (1078)

The death of Basil II marked a turning point in the history of the Byzantine State. After the magnificent achievements of the three Emperors of the period of the “Reconquest” (963-1025), what followed was a period of relative stability and peace which the Empire had hardly ever known. Unfortunately, this breathing space was not spent in conservation and consolidation, in an attempt to secure and expand what had already been achieved, but it resulted in a period of internal relaxation which gradually broke-up the military system that had been carefully managed up to Basil’s reign and resulted to significant ground-losses for the Empire in all fronts. The questions that will be asked in this section of my thesis are: what were the military defeats inflicted to the Byzantine Army in this period in both Asia Minor and the Balkans? Was the result of any of these defeats significant enough to destroy a large part of the Imperial forces and cause any major geo-political changes to take place?

But in order to fully understand the collapse of Imperial control in the frontiers of the Balkans and in Asia Minor in the mid-eleventh century, we have to examine the principal cause that eroded these foundations. The answer to the question is the “buffer states” of Bulgaria and Armenia.⁴⁴¹ Before the final annexation of the Armenian Kingdom of Ani by Constantine IX, these elite Armenian soldiers served as a protective shield for the Empire’s north-eastern borders in Asia Minor and were an invaluable source for the Byzantine

⁴⁴¹ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 37-44.

infantry.⁴⁴² The same thing was true for the Kingdom of Bulgaria, with the latter being an effective “buffer state” between the Imperial lands of Macedonia and Thrace and the areas north of the Danube that were dominated by the nomadic tribes of the Patzinaks.⁴⁴³ The latter had served the Byzantine Emperors in several occasions, either as vassals or paid mercenaries against the Russians in the north or the Hungarians in the west.⁴⁴⁴ But the subjugation of Bulgaria by Basil II in the 1010s, along with the pressure by the Uzes and Cuman Turcoman tribes, caused the Patzinaks to cross the Danube in 1047 and invade Imperial territories, while the Arabs in the East were replaced by a far more dangerous enemy, the Seljucs. The collapse of the Imperial frontiers seemed imminent, mostly because the army and, most importantly, the Treasury could not support the demand for soldiers from both theatres of war, let alone more distant provinces like Longobardia where the Normans had already begun their expansion.⁴⁴⁵ After the 1050s, the increasing pressure in the Empire’s borders both in the East and West, combined with the civil wars of the period that diverted large numbers of soldiers away from the external threats proved too much.

In the Balkans, the most significant geo-political development was the invasion of Imperial territory by the Patzinak tribes in the winter of 1046/47 and a settlement of about 800,000 of them in areas of Bulgaria and northern Macedonia, roughly between Sofia and Nis.⁴⁴⁶ The fact that the Empire had to accept the settlement of the Patzinaks on Imperial soil and employ them as garrison troops and thematic levies reveals its military weakness to barricade their way south of the Danube. In the following decade, the Byzantines were twice

⁴⁴² E. McGeer, “The legal decree of Nicephoros II Phocas concerning Armenian stratiotai”, *Peace and War in Byzantium*, ed. T. Miller, J. Nesbitt, CUA, Washington DC, 1995, 123-37.

⁴⁴³ *De Administrando Imperio*, pp. 49ff.

⁴⁴⁴ *De Administrando Imperio*, 2, 4, 5, pp. 49-53.

⁴⁴⁵ For the economy and the debasement of the coinage: Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 81-91; Hendy, *Byzantine Monetary Economy*; M. Whittow, “The middle Byzantine economy (600-1204)”, *C.H.B.S.*, 465-92.

⁴⁴⁶ Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 37-40; Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, pp. 393-6; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 333-4; Our main primary sources are: Skylitzes, II, pp. 581-605; Zonaras, III, pp. 641-44; Attaleiates, pp. 30ff; Cecaumenus, pp. 22-23.

forced to mount large-scale campaigns to “pacify” them, in 1052 and 1059, and in both cases the Byzantines were beaten back by the Turkish guerrilla-war tactics and the weather. Thus, in order to use these fine mounted archers for its interests, the central government would attempt to turn their territories to buffer zones against the Uzes and the Cumans, in coordination with several key Byzantine garrisons in the area, and employ them as mercenary troops. The Byzantines were up against a much more formidable enemy, the Seljuks, and they needed all the help they could get.

Crossing over to Asia Minor, although the Seljuks appeared in the eastern borders of the Empire around the mid-eleventh century,⁴⁴⁷ Turkish troops were familiar to the Byzantines due to their employment by the Arabs. Certainly the Fatimids of Cairo, the Hamdanids of Aleppo and the Abbasids as well – already since the reign of Mu’tasim (833-42) –⁴⁴⁸ had allowed them to infiltrate into their armies, usually as elite corps of slave-soldiers (*ghulam mamluk*), initially forming the ruler’s or general’s personal retinue which eventually came to represent the nucleus of Muslim armies.⁴⁴⁹ The nomadic tribes of the Seljuks, however, first appeared on the eastern Byzantine frontiers in the second quarter of the eleventh century and on the early 1050s the Turkish pressure on the Armenian lands, recently annexed by Byzantium, resulted in the sack of the key city of Kars in the heart-land of Iberia, in 1053.⁴⁵⁰ Two years later, the much weakened but spiritually significant Buwayhid Caliphate of Baghdad also fell to the Seljuks. Although the Fatimids of Cairo probably posed a more serious threat to the Sultan, the latter, in order to protect his northern borders, diverted a large number of mounted Turkish nomads (Islamized Turks of the Oguz tribe) to conduct large-

⁴⁴⁷ For an introductory study, see: D.A. Korobeinikov, “Raiders and Neighbours: The Turks (1040-1304)”, *C.H.B.E.*, 692-710.

⁴⁴⁸ For Mu’tasim’s important but largely neglected victory upon the Byzantines at Dazimon, in 838, with the crucial help of 10,000 Turkish mounted archers, see: W. E. Kaegi, “The Contribution of Archery to the Turkish Conquest of Anatolia”, *Speculum*, 39 (1964), 99-102.

⁴⁴⁹ J. Waterson, *The Knights of Islam, the Wars of the Mamluks*, Greenhill, London, 2007, pp. 33-53, especially pp. 37-44.

⁴⁵⁰ *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, 47-50, 92, pp. 44-6, 76-7.

scale raids in the Sultanate's northern border areas, including Armenia.⁴⁵¹ Due to these raids the entire Byzantine defence system in the eastern border areas collapsed in just two years (1058-9), with the Turkish nomads sacking the key cities of Melitene (1058), Sebasteia (1059) and several others in Syria and Mesopotamia throughout the 1060s.

A key question is what caused this sudden collapse of the Byzantine defence system in the East in just two years?⁴⁵² It would be wrong to consider the decline of the thematic army that manned these key border cities as one of the reasons, mostly due to the fact that this process of erosion had been taking place for many decades, and yet the defence of these areas seemed to work well enough before the Seljuc invasion, with the area experiencing only minor incursions for nearly the last two centuries. Certainly the absence of the Armenian buffer state should be thought as one of them, with the Seljuc raids being directed against Byzantine territories and not against any other allied state. In addition, Constantine IX's decision to disband the thematic army of the ducate of Iberia in 1053, an army of about 10,000 men, and subject the soldiers to tax instead was seen as unprecedented. According to contemporary chroniclers like Attaleiates and Skylitzes who were senior officials in the capital it had catastrophic consequences for the Empire's eastern defences,⁴⁵³ while it also enabled professional but unreliable troops to take care of the defence of these border areas. In the end, the lightly armed but highly mobile Turkish nomads were able to penetrate deep into

⁴⁵¹ C. Cahen, "La Premiere Penetration Turque en Asie Mineure", *Byzantion*, 18 (1948), 5-67; J. T. Roche, "In the Wake of Matzikert: The First Crusade and the Alexian Reconquest of Western Anatolia", *History*, 94 (2009), 135-53.

⁴⁵² General works include: S. Vryonis, "Byzantium: the Social Basis of Decline", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, 2 (1959), 157-75; P. Charanis, "The Byzantine Empire in the Eleventh Century", *A History of the Crusades*, ed. K.M.Setton, M.A.Baldwin, Philadelphia, 1956, vol. I, 177-219; M. Angold, "The Byzantine State on the Eve of the Battle of Matzikert", *Matzikert to Lepanto: the Byzantine World and the Turks 1071-1571*, Amsterdam, 1991, 9-34; Cahen, "La Premiere penetration turque", 5-67.

⁴⁵³ Skylitzes, II, p. 608; Attaleiates, pp. 44-45; *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, 92, p. 76.

Byzantine territory by simply by-passing the highly fortified places, with the Imperial forces being unable to intercept them due to their poor mobility and leadership.⁴⁵⁴

What Romanus IV Diogenes found in the army when he was pronounced Emperor on 1st January 1068 was quite shocking, with the thematic armies having fallen into decay, the tagmatic armies having lost a percentage of their strength and with their morale shattered by their involvement into this period's civil wars, while the small mercenary units were certainly unable to stand up to the Emperor's expectations in taking the offensive against the Turks. By the winter of 1070/1, the Emperor was preparing for his third and final expedition against the Seljuks, in an attempt to re-establish control over lower Armenia and the important Armenian fortresses, apparently to block the Turkish invasions bypassing the Taurus Mountains.⁴⁵⁵

The army that the Emperor had gathered in Armenia is quite difficult to estimate in terms of numbers, but the chroniclers do give us its consistency. For the mercenary forces, Romanus was certainly accompanied by a detachment of the Varangian Guard, although not the full contingent of 6,000 men;⁴⁵⁶ a detachment of Frankish heavy cavalry of unknown size, led by the "Latin from Italy" named Crispinus, had been sent to Abydos earlier in the campaign;⁴⁵⁷ a German mercenary battalion serving as the Emperor's personal guard, called Nemitzoi, was also sent to a distant post in the Balkans due to its rebellious acting;⁴⁵⁸ a contingent of Franks under Roussel of Bailleuil, again of unknown size but probably no more than a thousand;⁴⁵⁹ detachments of Patzinaks and Oguz Turks, whose exact number is

⁴⁵⁴ Kaegi, "The Contribution of Archery", 104-6.

⁴⁵⁵ Attaliates, 136; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 42-44; J. Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars: battles and campaigns of the Byzantine era*, Tempus, Stroud, 2000, p. 112; Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 40-1; for the fragmented landscape of the Pontic and Transcaucasian mountains, see: M. Whittow, "The Political Geography of the Byzantine World – Geographical Survey", *O.H.B.S.*, 223-5.

⁴⁵⁶ Skylitzes, II, p. 668.

⁴⁵⁷ Attaliates, pp. 122-5, 170-1; Skylitzes, II, pp. 702-3.

⁴⁵⁸ Attaliates, p. 147; Zonaras, III, pp. 696-7; for more on this German battalion, see: Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, p. 114.

⁴⁵⁹ Attaliates, pp. 148-9.

unknown;⁴⁶⁰ there was also a unit of Russian mercenaries of unknown size, distinct from the Varangian Guard, which is mentioned by an Arab source.⁴⁶¹

Regarding the indigenous units, they included both tagmatic and thematic troops. Since 1069, Romanus had called for the five tagmata of the East for training and to fill in their ranks with new recruits.⁴⁶² Theoretically these units should have numbered 12,000 men in total, but it is highly unlikely that Romanus was able to bring their numbers back up to their original strength.⁴⁶³ In the spring of 1071 Romanus called for further reinforcements from his Western tagmatic units, raising the number to an additional 12,000 men.⁴⁶⁴ Concerning the thematic armies of Asia Minor, the primary sources specifically refer to detachments from the themata of Armeniakon, Cappadocia, Armenian heavy infantry from Theodosiopolis and the thema of Anatolikon (units from Pisidia and Lykaonia are mentioned), while it is almost certain that the neighbouring themata of Antioch (Ducate), Chaldea (Ducate), Sebasteia, Charsianum and Colonia also contributed troops in the Imperial army.⁴⁶⁵ Trying to assess the exact numbers of these units seems hopeless, with the margin for error being high enough, but in theory the numbers for the small themata like Lykaonia were 800 men, while larger ones like Armeniakon could have had a contingent of 5,000 men. Further, detachments of unknown strength were brought from mainland Greece, specifically from the theme of Bulgaria and Macedonia.⁴⁶⁶ The grand total of mercenaries and indigenous troops that

⁴⁶⁰ Attaliates calls them indiscriminately Scyths: Ibid., pp. 127, 148; Skylitzes mentions them as “the Uzes and the other neighbouring nations”: Skylitzes, II, p. 668.

⁴⁶¹ C. Cahen, “La campagne de Matzikert d’après les sources musulmanes”, *Byzantion*, 9 (1934), 613-42.

⁴⁶² Attaliates, pp. 103-5.

⁴⁶³ Haldon suggests a drop of about 50% in their numbers, lowering their figures to about 1,000 men in each tagma, see: Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, pp. 116-7.

⁴⁶⁴ The western tagmata would have sustained fewer losses throughout the decades than their eastern counterparts. See: Attaliates, 123; Skylitzes, II, pp. 678-9.

⁴⁶⁵ Attaliates, pp. 122-4, 148-9; Skylitzes, II, pp. 668-9, 678-81; Bryennios, p. 35.

⁴⁶⁶ Skylitzes probably means the Ducate of Thessalonika and the small themata of Strymon and Veroia: Skylitzes, II, pp. 668-9.

Romanus had brought with him in the early summer of 1071, and by all means this was not the full military strength of the Empire considering all the garrison-troops that were left in other sensitive border areas like Italy, the Balkans and Syria, can be put to around 40,000 men, although both the loyalty of the mercenaries and the training and equipment of many of the thematic units has to be seriously questioned.

The Imperial army seems to have escaped relatively unscathed from the day's fighting on the 26th August 1071, with the political consequences of the defeat at Matzikert being by far more significant than the losses in the battlefield.⁴⁶⁷ The rearguard and reserve units under the treacherous command of Andronicus Doukas, consisting probably of some of the eastern tagmata along with the contingents of the Patzinaks and the Oguz Turks, certainly escaped back to the capital without suffering any casualties. Bryennius' left wing, which included the five western tagmata also escaped with relatively few losses, with these units being found defending the Balkans against the Patzinaks the following years. Concerning the units of the right wing under Alyates, and especially the Armenian and Cappadocian forces, the sources tell us that a significant numbers of them managed to escape in order to Trapezounta, Theodosiopolis and Dokeia (an important fortress on the main routes to Constantinople, north-east of Amaseia). In addition, no great military figure is mentioned to have died in the battle.⁴⁶⁸ If we add the elite units of Tarchaniotes and Roussel which retreated to Melitene before the battle, a significant number of around 20,000 men,⁴⁶⁹ it seems clear that the actual losses incurred during the battle were limited to the Emperor's immediate retinue, the Armenian infantry and the tagmata close to him, a percentage of around 5% – 10% of the campaigning army.⁴⁷⁰ The Matzikert campaign may have been a strategic failure but it was

⁴⁶⁷ Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, pp. 112-27; Cheynet, "Matzikert", 410-38; A. Friendly, *The Dreadful Day: The Battle of Manzikert, 1071*, London, 1981.

⁴⁶⁸ Attaliates, p. 167.

⁴⁶⁹ Attaliates, pp. 155, 158; Zonaras, III, p. 697.

⁴⁷⁰ Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, p. 126; Cheynet, "Matzikert", 431.

not a tactical disaster as it has been carelessly noted by some contemporary – like Attaleiates – and modern historians.

The defeat at Matzikert and the civil wars of the early 1070s that followed the usurpation of the throne by Michael VII Doukas (1071-78), marked the collapse of the Empire in both the East and West. In Italy, Bari fell to the Normans in 1071, while between the years 1072-77 the Byzantine authority in the Balkans was also seriously shaken. A Bulgarian revolt broke out in 1072, which was suppressed with great difficulty by local generals, while in 1075 Croatia, a vassal state since the times of Basil II, declared its independence and loyalty to Rome. This period is also characterised by numerous Patzinak and Hungarian raids that spread havoc in the southern and western Balkans respectively. In Asia Minor, the treaty agreed between Alp-Arslan and Romanus was abandoned, thus giving the Turks an excuse to invade Imperial territories. The severity of the Turkish raids, conducted by various Turkish chieftains and concentrating mainly on the north-western Anatolian plateau, along with Constantinople's tactic of eliminating key local landowners responsible for the defence of their localities for fear of rebellions, led to the loss of key cities like Doryleum, Ankyra, Ikonion, Amaseia and Caesarea upon which lay the control of the entire Anatolian plateau. In 1078, according to Anna Comnena: "It is true that in this area [Asia Minor] the Empire was reduced to its last men. Turkish infiltration had scattered the eastern armies in all directions and the Turks were in almost complete control of all the districts between the Black Sea and the Hellespont, the Syrian and Aegean waters"⁴⁷¹

Finally, the last major battle before the rise of Alexius Comnenus to the Imperial throne was the one that took place at Kalavrye, in 1078.⁴⁷² In March 1078, the incapable Michael VII was forced to abdicate by a representative of the military aristocracy, the old strategos of the thema of Anatolikon Nicephoros Botaneiates. The latter, however, was soon challenged by the dux of Dyrrachium Nicephoros Bryennius, a general with a glorious military career as

⁴⁷¹ *Alexiad*, I. iv., p. 25; Sewter, p. 38.

⁴⁷² Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, pp. 127-33; N. Tobias, "The Tactics and Strategy of Alexius Comnenus at Calavrytae, 1078", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 6 (1979), 193-211.

dux of Bulgaria since 1074, who marched from his base at Dyrrachium against the capital, and established himself at Adrianople, his home city. The Emperor sent the experienced Domesticus of the West Alexius Comnenus to suppress the rebellion with all the troops he could muster.

The rebel general, taking advantage of his office had managed to gather an army of mercenaries and indigenous troops from Macedonia, Thessaly and Thrace.⁴⁷³ The three divisions drawn by Bryennius for the battle included the right wing under the command of Bryennius' brother John who had a contingent of 5,000 men including Frankish mercenaries, Normans from Italy and, according to Anna, the *Maniacatoi* who had taken part in George Maniaces' Sicilian expedition (1038-41),⁴⁷⁴ cavalry units from Thessaly and troops from the *etaireia*, the Emperor's personal guard which consisted of foreign troops.⁴⁷⁵ It is clear at this point that Bryennius had taken full advantage of his position at Dyrrachium to call for reinforcements from the other side of the Adriatic. On the left wing Katakalon Tarchaniotes commanded some 3,000 troops from Macedonia and Thrace while the centre, consisting of 3-4,000 men from Macedonia, Thessaly and Thrace, was under the orders of Bryennius himself. Further, there was a contingent of Patzinak mercenaries of unknown size situated at a mile's distance from the main rebel army, ready to outflank the Imperial units. Opposing this rebel army of about 13,000 men, Alexius had about 2,000 Turkish troops, provided by Sulleyman-ibn-Qutlumus who was a vassal of Botaneiates, a few hundred mounted Franks⁴⁷⁶ and the cavalry tagma of the Immortals⁴⁷⁷ numbering around 1,000, both which he

⁴⁷³ The composition of both armies is given by: *Alexiad*, I. iv-vi, pp. 23-38; Sewter, pp. 39-48; Zonaras, III, pp. 716-7.

⁴⁷⁴ *Alexiad*, I. v, p. 27; Sewter, p. 40; Attaleiates, p. 242; these Maniacatoi were most likely the sons of the former soldiers of George Maniaces who had settled in Illyria after the defeat of their commander in 1042.

⁴⁷⁵ Exactly how the Emperor's personal guard deserted to the rebel army remains a mystery.

⁴⁷⁶ Zonaras, III, p. 717.

⁴⁷⁷ This tagma has nothing to do with John Tzimiskes' tagma of the Immortals which was established in 969.

commanded in person, and the indigenous troops from Choma (a place close to the river Maeander in Phrygia), probably around 2,000 men strong or even less.

There are several conclusions that can be drawn from analysing the composition of the two armies of 1078. First, it is quite clear that the role of the mercenaries is a key one, with Turkish, Patzinak and Frankish troops being employed by both sides and in large numbers. In the same time, the role of the indigenous troops is becoming less and less significant. The indigenous troops of the east, both thematic and tagmatic, had virtually disappeared with Alexius being capable of mustering only a few thousand Phrygians from Choma, considering that these troops had been withdrawn to the capital a few years before by Michael VII. However, we must also add the factor of time, something that the central government did not have in abundance in order to raise extra troops from the remnants of the themata of the East. Further, examining the troops that Bryennius had managed to raise, we can see that the major provinces of the west, mainly Macedonia, Bulgaria, Dyrrachium and Thessaly had kept their numbers more or less intact. Something that draws attention, though, is the absence of the tagmata of the west from this battle. Was the latter unable to contact them? Probably, although we have to consider that most of the original tagmata, like the Scholae, the Excubitors and the Watch, have declined in such a degree after Matzikert that they were less and less mentioned by contemporary chroniclers.

The Varangians and Franks in the eleventh century Byzantine Army

It is common knowledge to everyone who has dealt with the history of the Byzantine Empire that non-Greek mercenaries were employed by the Emperors since the times of the Late Roman period, depending on the occasional needs of the Imperial army for additional high-quality manpower. Narrowing down our analyses to the period of the “Reconquest” (963-1025), we have numerous examples of non-Greek troops finding their way to the Imperial pay-rolls, not yet termed as *μισθοφόροι* (the person who receives pay) but rather as “allies” (*σύμμαχοι*) or “foreigners” (*εθνικοί*). Throughout the aforementioned period,

considerable numbers of Rus, Bulgarians, Armenians, Abkhazians and Hungarians joined the Imperial forces in Asia Minor or in the Balkans, with the characteristic examples being the Arab campaigns of Nicephorus Phocas and John Tzimiskes and the Bulgarian wars of Basil II. These troops were supplied by countries that were either in cordial relations with Constantinople or were depended upon their trading agreements or were simply satellite or vassal states. And in order to raise these sizeable enough units, Constantinople had to have the permission and active cooperation of their respective lords or overlords. But what was the difference between these large units of foreign mercenaries and the Westerners that first appeared in the Imperial Court in middle of the eleventh century?

Let's examine the Byzantine expedition in Sicily in 1038, when a contingent of 300 mounted Normans took part in that campaign, sent by Gaimar of Salerno who was the suzerain of the Normans of Aversa and a vassal of the Empire. The case of the Normans fits in the already established pattern of the Byzantines employing large units of mercenary soldiers to cover their occasional need for troops, a very common practice for the central government or for local commanders. However, the Frankish troops that first arrived at Constantinople in the mid-eleventh century, although they were receiving a fixed pay (*ρόγα – σιτηρέσιον*) and could easily desert their employers if their reward was not satisfactory enough, their main difference was that they were employed as individuals – materialistic volunteers who had travelled long-way in search for sufficient pay and the opportunity to pillage and destroy, literally matching the term “soldiers of fortune”. Further, the contingents of troops provided by the aforementioned states were serving the Emperor for a limited number of campaigns, while a large number of Franks served under Imperial generals for many decades, either for or against the Emperor. Thus, the 300 Normans of the 1038 campaign, although they were sent by Gaimar of Salerno who was a vassal of Byzantium, they were not their native subjects and they were serving George Maniaces under their own leaders, namely William and Drogo Hauteville. A significant number of them are still

referred to as “Maniacatoi” by Anna Comnena in 1078,⁴⁷⁸ serving the rebel Bryennius at the battle of Kalavrye.

A key date, however, for the mercenary forces in the Byzantine Empire is the year 988 which marks the arrival of the Scandinavian regiment of the 6,000 Varangians in the capital.⁴⁷⁹ Upon their arrival, the Varangians relieved the *Excubitors*⁴⁸⁰ and they were divided into the “Varangians of the City” (*οι εν τη πόλη Βαράγγοι*), who guarded the Emperor and escorted him in his tours outside the palace, either within the capital or in his campaigns, and the “Varangians outside the City” (*οι έξω της πόλεως Βαράγγοι*) who were stationed in key posts in the provinces.⁴⁸¹ Undoubtedly, the Guard would have formed the spearhead of Basil’s expansionist policy, from the Syrian expedition of 999⁴⁸² and the Armenian campaign of 1000⁴⁸³ to the bloody and destructive Bulgarian wars that culminated in the Battle of Kleidion (1014).⁴⁸⁴ In addition, they were involved in suppressing the Lombard rebellion in

⁴⁷⁸ *Alexiad*, I, v, p. 27; Sewter, p. 40.

⁴⁷⁹ Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, p. 304; Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, vol. I, p. 392; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, p. 25; for the description of the arrival of the Varangians in the capital, see: Psellus, *Chronographia*, I, 13-15, pp. 34-5; see also: Skylitzes, II, p. 444; Zonaras, vol. III, p. 553; Asochik, *Histoire Universelle*, tr. E. Dulaurier and F. Macler, Paris, 1883-1917, vol. II, pp. 164-5; Yahia-ibn-Said, *Histoire*, ed. and tr. I. Krachkovskii and A.A. Vasiliev, *Patrologia Orientalis*, 18.5 and 23.3, Paris, 1925-32, pp. 425-6.

⁴⁸⁰ Elite unit of the *Scholae* responsible for the defence of the Imperial Palace.

⁴⁸¹ Blondal, *The Varangians of Byzantium*, tr. and ed. by B. Benediktz, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 45; D. Obolensky, *Byzantine Commonwealth*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1971, p. 233.

⁴⁸² G. Schlumberger, *L'épopée byzantine à la fin du dixième siècle: guerres contre les Russes, les Arabes, les Allemands, les Bulgares: luttes civiles contre les deux Bardas*, vol. II, Hachette & cie, Paris, 1896-1905, pp. 152-3; B.S. Benediktz, “The Evolution of the Varangian Regiment in the Byzantine Army”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 62 (1969), 24.

⁴⁸³ Asochik, *Histoire*, p. 165; our Armenian sources describes an incident between Varangian and Armenian forces in an Armenian city where the former are described clearly as foot-soldiers that used horses to ride to battle.

⁴⁸⁴ Our main Byzantine source is Skylitzes, II, p. 348; the main secondary works are: P. Stephenson, *The Legend of Basil the Bulgar-Slayer*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,

the Catepanate of Longobardia, sent in that distant province in no small numbers between the years 1018-19, again in 1038 while they also took part in the abortive Sicilian campaign of 1025. But this will be thoroughly analysed in a following chapter.

In the period of the *Epigonoï*, a key date concerning the leadership of the Varangian Guard was the year 1034, when the younger half-brother of the Norwegian King Olaf II and future King Harald III (Hardrada) had made his way to enter the Varangian Guard. From this year onwards, our main primary sources for the Varangians consist mainly of numismatic and other archaeological evidence, along with Scandinavian sagas which entail the life stories of Haraldr Sigurdarson. These, mainly Norwegian and Icelandic, sagas were written down even 200 years after the events had taken place and they can be quite misleading. According to them, Harald and his mercenaries “served on the galleys with the force that went into the Grecian Sea.”⁴⁸⁵ It is quite reasonable for the Empire to have used those much experienced mercenaries in policing duties in the Aegean Sea,⁴⁸⁶ an area that was ravaged by Arab raids in the past centuries, even more so if we consider the grand naval strategy that had started taking shape, as early as the reign of Romanus III (1028-34), and involved the revival of the Imperial Fleet and the expulsion of the Muslims from Sicily.⁴⁸⁷ However, whether the Varangians were used as crews of some sort of privateer ships or they actually manned Imperial ships, thus being under the direct command of the *Drungarie of the ploimon*, is not made entirely clear by the sources, although the last case seems much more likely. Further, it

2003, pp. 11-49; *Byzantium's Balkan frontier : a political study of the northern Balkans, 900-1204*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 47-80; although the author's ground-breaking opinions should be viewed with some caution; J.A. Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, Michigan University Press, Ann Arbor, 2008, pp. 188-200.

⁴⁸⁵ *Heimskringla*, ed. B.Adalbjarnson, Reykjavik, 1941-51; *Chronicle of the Kings of Norway* (Snorro Sturleson), ed. S. Laing, 3 vols., Longman, London, 1844; the Byzantine sources are: Skylitzes, II, 511-13; Zonaras, III, p. 589.

⁴⁸⁶ *Chronicle*, ed. S.Laing, v. III, pp. 4, 6.

⁴⁸⁷ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, p. 123.

is important to note that in this early period Harald was still in command of the “Varangians outside of the City”, which probably had its winter quarters in the Thraceseion theme.⁴⁸⁸

The campaign that made Harald’s Varangian Guard famous, however, was their participation in the 1038 campaign against the Kalbite Muslims of Sicily, under the command of the famous George Maniaces.⁴⁸⁹ In this campaign a contingent of Varangians, probably around 500⁴⁹⁰ under the command of Harald, was sent to Italy to take part in the expulsion of the Kalbiters, along with units from the Greek mainland and 300 Normans from Aversa.⁴⁹¹ The specific role played by the Varangians in this campaign is rather obscure, although the *Heimskringla* implies that they were used to man the Imperial naval squadron sent to patrol the coastline of eastern Sicily. It is also highly likely that they were sent to reduce a number of fortified sites in the east and south-east of the island.⁴⁹² The fact that they manned Imperial ships during this campaign is further supported by their role in Apulia between the years 1066-68, a very similar operational theatre where they patrolled the Apulian coasts and defeated a Norman fleet off Brindisi according to contemporary chroniclers. However, it is very regrettable that only the *Heimskringla*, an unreliable saga written centuries later, is our

⁴⁸⁸ Skylitzes, II, pp. 508-9.

⁴⁸⁹ For George Maniaces’ career and life, see: A. Savvides, *Γεώργιος Μανιάκης. Κατακτήσεις και υπονόμευση στο Βυζάντιο του 11^{ου} αιώνα, 1030-1043 μ.Χ.*, Athens, 2004; G. Leveniotis, «Η Πολιτική κατάρρευση του Βυζαντίου στην Ανατολή, το ανατολικό σύνορο και η κεντρική Μικρά Ασία κατά το Β’ ήμισυ του 11^{ου} αιώνα», unpublished D.Phil. thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, 2007, pp. 189, 493.

⁴⁹⁰ Cecaumenus, p. 97.

⁴⁹¹ Malaterra, I. 7; Amatus, II. 8; *Gesta*, I, 203-6, p. 110; Skylitzes mentions 500 Normans: Skylitzes, II, p. 545.

⁴⁹² The *Heimskringla* tells us about the siege of four unidentified castles: *Chronicle*, ed. S.Laing, v. III, pp. 7-12; could it be that the two of them were Messina and Syracuse, for which the rest of our sources talk about? See: Malaterra, I. 7; Amatus, II. 8, 9; Skylitzes also mentions the capture of thirteen more cities: Skylitzes, II, p. 520; Zonaras, III, pp. 590-4; For the course of the campaign, see: Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, v. II, pp. 438-55; Gay, *L’Italie Meridionale*, pp. 450-54; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 78-80; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 88-96.

only source concerning the siege-tactics of the Varangians in Sicily.⁴⁹³ These were the enforcement of a land-blockade, the digging of tunnels to undermine the city-walls, along with other “unchivalric” tricks employed to win over an unidentified castle.

The Varangians were further involved in all the major expeditions that took place during Constantine IX’s reign, throughout the 1040s and 1050s, in both Asia Minor and the Balkans. A force of 3,000 of them participated in the annexation of the Armenian Kingdom of Ani (1045),⁴⁹⁴ while three years later they were called in the Balkans to fight the Patzinak penetration south of the Danube.⁴⁹⁵ In the mid-1050s, a large unit of Varangians and Normans was called to defend the Imperial fortresses in Armenia against the Seljuc raids, with much success.⁴⁹⁶ During the civil conflicts after Constantine IX’s death in 1055 we have the first case where the rare phenomenon of Varangians facing each other occurred. The fact that Isaac Comnenus, the leader of the *coup d’état* against Michael VI (1056-57), had employed Varangian troops as well as Normans as it will be seen later on, is attested by Psellus who was an eye-witness of the events as the Emperor’s ambassador to his rival.⁴⁹⁷ It is more likely, though, that the Emperor’s units were the “Varangians of the City”, the personal guard of Michael, while Isaac must have employed the “Varangians of outside the City”, who would have been in the Armeniac theme fighting the Seljucs just before Isaac’s *coup d’état*.⁴⁹⁸

In the 1060s the Varangians were detached in the distant province of Longobardia primarily for garrison duties in strategic fortresses. In 1066, a contingent of them was sent to

⁴⁹³ Skylitzes, II, pp. 520-3, 545; Zonaras, III, pp. 590-4; the “Italian-Norman” sources are: Malaterra, I, 7, 1. 8; *Gesta*, I, 196-221, pp. 108-110; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1038.

⁴⁹⁴ Skylitzes, II, pp. 572-3.

⁴⁹⁵ Attaliates, pp. 31-43; Cecaumenos, pp. 22-3.

⁴⁹⁶ Matthew of Edessa, *Chronique*, tr. E. Dulaurier, Paris, 1858, pp. 99-102; *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, II, 3, p. 87; Skylitzes, II, p. 606; see also: Schlumberger, *L’epopee*, III, p. 598.

⁴⁹⁷ Psellus, *Chronographia*, VII, 25, p. 289.

⁴⁹⁸ Skylitzes, II, p. 624.

Bari, under the command of Leo Mavrikas, to take the initiative against the Normans in Apulia. He succeeded in re-taking Taranto, Brindisi and Castellanetta, with a number of Varangians being posted in Brindisi to defend it against the Normans.⁴⁹⁹ It is quite possible that they were not withdrawn from Italy until the Norman siege of Bari in 1068. During the course of the siege they were probably used in one of their usual tasks – the naval patrolling of the Apulian coasts. Indeed, Lupus Protospatharius and Skylitzes refer to a naval engagement off Brindisi, in 1070, where the Byzantine fleet consisting of Varangians defeated Robert Guiscard's inexperienced fleet.⁵⁰⁰ Also, Cecaumenos clearly distinguishes between the infantry units of the Rus, who are identified as *κονταράτοι*, and the Varangians who were *πλόιμοι*.⁵⁰¹ But all of these events will be analysed in detail in a following chapter.

Another foreign element that came to dominate the Varangian Guard in the last quarter of the eleventh century and gradually replaced the Rus was the English, and by mentioning English we mean both Anglo-Saxons and Anglo-Danes. The first mentioning of English warriors in the Byzantine court by a Byzantine source comes by Anna Comnena when she narrates her father's rebellion against Botaneiates in the spring of 1081. She specifically talks about the "Varangians from Thule", meaning warriors from the British Isles.⁵⁰² Our second primary source for the English migration is Orderic Vitalis who refers to "some of them [English] who were still in the flower of their youth travelled into remote lands and bravely offered their arms to Alexius, emperor of Constantinople."⁵⁰³ At another point in his work, when examining Robert Guiscard's invasion of Illyria, in 1081, he talks about Emperor

⁴⁹⁹ *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1066; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. 183; Gay, *L' Italie Meridionale*, p. 535.

⁵⁰⁰ Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1071; Skylitzes, II, pp. 722-23.

⁵⁰¹ Cecaumenos, p. 30.

⁵⁰² *Alexiad*, II. ix, p. 120; Sewter, p. 95; I do not agree with Blondal who argues that Anna uses *Thule* to refer to Iceland and, probably, Norway. See: *Alexiad*, VI. xi, p. 312; Sewter, pp. 205-6; Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, p. 438, and compare with Blondal's argument: S. Blondal, "Nabites the Varangian", *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 2 (1939), 145-47.

⁵⁰³ Orderic Vitalis, IV, p. 202.

Alexius who “received into his trust the English who had left England after the slaughter of King Harold ... and had sailed across the sea to Thrace [Greece]. He openly entrusted his principal palace and royal treasures to their care, even making them guards of his own person and all his possessions.”⁵⁰⁴ Here, Orderic implies that the English newcomers clearly replaced their Rus counterparts as the Emperor’s personal bodyguard, but we have no idea whether they were numerous enough to dominate the “Varangians outside of the City” as well. In addition, Geoffrey Malaterra talks, for the first time, about the “Angles – whom they [the Byzantines] called Varangians” when describing the opposing forces right before the battle of Dyrrachium.⁵⁰⁵ In addition, Skylitzes refers to the Varangians who took part in Isaac Comnenus’ rebellion against Michael VI in 1057, as of clearly Celtic origin (*γένος δε Κέλτικον οι Βαράγγιοι*).⁵⁰⁶ Since there is no case whatsoever that the Varangian guard would have had become “English” already since the mid-1050s we presume that the chronicler, who writes around the end of the eleventh century, is confused and apparently refers to the post-1081 composition of the Guard.⁵⁰⁷ The aforementioned quotes from four contemporary and reliable chroniclers, combined with a chrysobull issued by Alexius Comnenus in 1088, where the foreign mercenaries serving in the Imperial army were: “Russians, *Varangians*, *Kulpingians*, *English*, Franks, Germans, Bulgarians, Saracens, Alans and Abasgians”,⁵⁰⁸ drives us to the conclusion that after the first few years of Alexius’ reign the Rus had come to be replaced as the dominant element in the Varangian Guard. In addition, the fact that the English are listed separately from the Varangians makes us think that it was probably the

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., VII, p. 16.

⁵⁰⁵ Malaterra, 3. 27; Blondal believes that Malaterra might have been carried away by the presence of separate English regiments amongst the, mainly Russian-Norse, Varangian Guard at Dyrrachium, but although possible, it seems to me too manufactured. See: Blondal, “Nabites the Varangian”, 151-2, 157; *The Varangians of Byzantium*, p. 21.

⁵⁰⁶ Skylitzes, II, p. 613.

⁵⁰⁷ Although he would have certainly been aware of the pre-1081 consistency of the Guard, being a senior official of the Imperial Army in the capital (*Drungarie of the Watch*), this reference by Skylitzes to the Celtic origin of the Varangians is used only once.

⁵⁰⁸ Zachariae a Lingenthal, *Jus Graeco-Romanum*, v. III, Lipsiae, 1867, p. 373.

Anglo-Danes, themselves of Scandinavian origin of course like the Varangians, who had infiltrated into the Guard. Thus, the year 1081 must be seen as a *terminus ante quem*; but do we have enough evidence to trace when this immigration to Byzantium begun?

Two other chrysobulls issued by Michael VII and Nicephoros Botaneiates, in 1075 and 1079 respectively, a list which is identical in both chrysobulls,⁵⁰⁹ do not mention the term English. This is also true for all of the eleventh century Byzantine primary sources that cover the 1066-81 periods,⁵¹⁰ apart from the sole reference of Skylitzes as we have already seen. Matthew of Edessa does mention some “inhabitants from distant islands” at Matzikert, but this does not constitute enough evidence to verify the existence of distinct English units for the 1068-71 periods.⁵¹¹ The year that is thought to be the most luring one to be considered as a *terminus post quem* is the fatal year 1066. However, the fact that they are not mentioned as distinct units in the Imperial army until 1081 is probably because the main wave of mercenaries did not come before the complete conquest of England by William II, his crushing of the local rebellions and the defeat of Denmark’s king Svein Estrithson in the spring of 1070.⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁹ C. Sathas, *Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*, v. I, Venice, 1872, p. 55.

⁵¹⁰ Skylitzes, Cecaumenus, Zonaras, Psellus, Attaleiates, Bryennius and Anna Comnena.

⁵¹¹ Matthew of Edessa, *Chronique*, pp. 166-9; see also: Cahen, “La campagne de Matzikert”, 629; K. Ciggaar, “England and Byzantium on the Eve of the Norman Conquest (The Reign of Edward the Confessor)”, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 5 (1982), 87-88. I do not agree with Ciggaar that Matthew’s comments constitute enough evidence to identify English units at Matzikert.

⁵¹² The predominance of the English in the Guard after 1081 is supported by a number of scholars: A.A. Vasiliev, “The opening Stages of the Anglo-Saxon Immigration to Byzantium in the Eleventh Century”, *Annales De L’Institute Kondakov*, 9 (1937), 39-70; J. Shepard, “The English and Byzantium: a study of their role in the Byzantine army in the later eleventh century”, *Traditio*, 29 (1973), 53-92; Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, pp. 235-6; Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. 76; Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 166-7; J.W. Birkenmeier, *The Development of the Komnenian Army*, Brill, Leiden, 2002, pp. 64-5; J. Godfrey, “The Defeated Anglo-Saxons Take Service with the Eastern Emperor”, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 1 (1978), 68-70.

Another mercenary element of the Byzantine army that came to play a vital role in the Empire's politics in the second half of the eleventh century, the Franks first appear as individual mercenaries in the Byzantine service in the year 1047, during the revolt of Leo Tornicius. Argyrus, son of the former Lombard rebel Melus and Catepan of Longobardia between the years 1042-5,⁵¹³ is mentioned by Skylitzes and the Anonymous of Bari to have been the protagonist of Constantinople's defence against Tornicius' forces, with the latter writing about a number of "Franks and Greeks" that have counter-attacked the besiegers in late September 1047.⁵¹⁴ Judging by this statement, we can see that Argyrus' coming to Constantinople in 1046 is highly likely to have been combined with a number of Normans from Italy.

Like the Varangians, the Franks were most likely used for purposes of defence, manning towns in the Armenian borders like Matzikert. After Tornicius' rebellion they were recalled, along with the rest of the eastern tagmata, to the Balkans to repel the Patzinak invasion of 1049. This time they also had their own leader, Hérve or *Ερβέβιος ο Φραγγόπωλος*,⁵¹⁵ a veteran of Maniaces' Sicilian campaign who commanded the left wing of the Imperial army in the battle against the Patzinaks.⁵¹⁶ This unit commanded by Hérve is described by Skylitzes as the wing of the "Roman phalanx", consisting of mounted Frankish mercenaries who were Hérve's fellow-countrymen (*ἀρχοντα τω τότε των ομοεθνών*). However, if we accept the possibility that Hérve's men were all Franks, their numbers should have been quite substantial if they made up a wing of the Imperial army's battle-line – probably a few hundred strong judging by Skylitzes?⁵¹⁷ Hérve also possessed the Court titles of *magistros*

⁵¹³ *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, pp. 165-6.

⁵¹⁴ Skylitzes, II, p. 563; *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1047; Psellus, *Chronographia*, VI. 111-2, pp. 212-3; J. Shepard, "The Uses of the Franks in Eleventh-Century Byzantium", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 15 (1993), 285-7.

⁵¹⁵ Frankopoulos meant, in Greek, "the son of a Frank". See: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, p. 922; E. Van Houts, "Normandy and Byzantium", *Byzantion*, 55 (1985), 554-5.

⁵¹⁶ Skylitzes, II, p. 597-605, 616.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 597-605, 617.

and *stratelates* of the East which put him in charge of, not only Frankish, but Byzantine tagmatic units in Asia Minor as well, thus replacing Catacalon Cecaumenos.⁵¹⁸

The way in which the new Frankish mercenaries were viewed by the Byzantines can be seen through the sending of Argyrus back to Bari to recruit more “Italian Normans”. William of Apulia writes of Argyrus’ trip to Italy, in 1051, to buy a number of Normans off to Byzantine service against the Seljuks by promising large sums of money and many presents.⁵¹⁹ In addition, we have to mention the embassy sent to Duke William of Normandy, around that period, by the Emperor Constantine IX in an official attempt to recruit new Normans “right from the source”, although we do not know if the Byzantine ambassadors succeeded in their task.⁵²⁰

In the 1050s the Franks were to be found in all the major operational theatres of the Empire. Skylitzes mentions the presence of Franks, this time they are specifically put on horseback, sent to Upper Armenia by Michael VI to fight-back a Seljuk raiding party in 1056, again under the command of Hérve.⁵²¹ This Frankish contingent not only managed to push back the Seljuks but, indeed, successfully pursued the retreating Turks, although as we have already seen that was a very dangerous battle-tactic. Perhaps they were still unfamiliar with the Seljuk battle-tactics!

During Isaac Comnenus’ rebellion against Michael VI, “two Frankish battalions and one Russian who were spending the winter in these areas [Armeniac thema]” were reported, probably after their successful fighting-back of the Seljuks in the previous summer (1056).⁵²² For these significant events, we have an eye-witness description from Psellus, who was one of the ambassadors sent by Michael VI to negotiate with Isaac: “There were Italians, and

⁵¹⁸ Shepard, “The Uses of the Franks”, 296-7; for the significance of these Court titles and their evolution since the seventh century, see: J.B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century*, London, 1911, pp. 20-36.

⁵¹⁹ *Gesta*, II. 55-60, p. 134.

⁵²⁰ *William of Poitiers*, pp. 96-7.

⁵²¹ Skylitzes, II, pp. 617-9.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, II, p. 624.

Scyths from the Taurus, men of fearful appearance, dressed in fearful garb, both alike glaring fiercely about them. The one [the Franks] made their attacks as their spirit moved them, were impetuous and led by impulse, the other [the Varangians] with a mad fury; the former in their first onslaught were irresistible, but they quickly lost their ardour; the latter, on the other hand, were less impatient, but fought with unsparing devotion and a complete disregard for wounds.”⁵²³ Again, we see in this description by Psellus the whole theme that dominated the Byzantine military manuals, from the *Strategicon* to the *Tactica*,⁵²⁴ where the Franks were characterised by the tremendous impact of their cavalry charge and their limited stamina.

In the late 1040s and the 1050s, the Franks would have been permanently established in areas pointed out by the government in order to live off the land. The places where we read of them being quartered for the winter in Asia Minor were in the Armeniac thema, while many of them should have been stationed in the neighbouring themata of Chaldea and Iberia, along with a number of Varangians.⁵²⁵ One valuable source to trace their whereabouts is the exemption acts (*chrysobulls*), granted to landowners or monastic houses from the obligation of providing shelter and all the necessary supplies to the Imperial army’s troops.⁵²⁶ This might be considered as an attempt not only to settle down these restless warriors, especially in a sensitive frontier area like the north-east Asia Minor, but also to avoid paying by cash in

⁵²³ Psellus, *Chronographia*, VII. 25, p. 289.

⁵²⁴ *Strategicon*, XI. 3, pp. 119-20; Leo VI, *Tactica*, XVIII. 80-101.

⁵²⁵ Skylitzes, II, 789, p. 606.

⁵²⁶ It was an obligation for every citizen of the Empire (even of great monastic houses) to supply the Imperial troops with quarters and all the residential necessities. In addition, there were special taxes imposed to the local population termed: *μιτάτον*, *φραγγομιτάτον*, *άπληκτον*, *μεσάπληκτον*, *φραγγιατικόν*. Thus, a great number of exemptions related to Varangians or Franks point out their winter quarters and establishments. See: *Actes de Lavra*, ed. G. Rouillard, P. Collomp, Paris, 1937, 1, 28, 80; Sathas, *Bibliotheca graeca*, 1, 55. For more on these sources, see: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 146-48; G. Ostrogorsky, “Pour l’histoire de l’immunité a Byzance”, *Byzantion*, 28 (1958), 165-254; G. Leveniotis, “Το στασιαστικό κίνημα του Νορμανδού Ουρσελίου (Ursel de Bailleuil) στην Μικρά Ασία, 1073-1076”, unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Thessaloniki, 2004, pp. 66ff.

a period when the collapse of the economy seemed imminent and the coin had already been significantly debased by Constantine IX.

The second of the three Frankish commanders to be found in Byzantium in our period of research was Robert Crispin. He had followed a rather similar career pattern as Hérve, having sailed to Constantinople “to become a noble (*chevalerie*) at the Emperor’s Court”,⁵²⁷ probably around the mid-1060s. After his arrival, Attaleiates tells us that Robert was immediately sent east to the Frankish camps to spend the winter, probably in 1068/9, along with the rest of his followers.⁵²⁸ It is not possible to estimate the number of his troops in this early stage, but Matthew of Edessa does mention a strong garrison of 200 Frankish knights at Sewawerat, north of Edessa in northern Mesopotamia, defending the castle against a Seljuc raid in 1065/66.⁵²⁹ Information from Skylitzes, Attaleiates, Bryennius and Zonaras put this number to four hundred, relating the army that Roussel of Bailleuil took over with that which Robert Crispin commanded before him.⁵³⁰ After Matzikert, Crispin took part in a campaign with his Frankish contingent against the former Emperor Romanus.⁵³¹

The fact that Crispin commanded the Byzantine Army’s left wing in a battle against Romanus would have raised great resentment and discontent from the Byzantine generals, both against Crispin and the Emperor. And this is duly noted by Cecaumenos in his *Στρατηγικόν*: “The foreigners, if they do not come from the royal family of their land, do not raise them in great offices nor trust them with significant titles; because if you honour the foreigner with the officium of primikerius or strategos, then what is the point of giving the generalship to a Roman? You will turn him [the Roman] into an enemy.”⁵³² The precedent of a Frank commanding a large division of the Byzantine army had already been set by Hérve in

⁵²⁷ Amatus, I. 8.

⁵²⁸ Attaleiates, p. 122; Skylitzes, II, p. 678.

⁵²⁹ *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, II, 27, pp. 107-8; Matthew also notes the presence of a Frank in the garrison of Edessa for the same year: *Ibid.*, II, 28, p. 109.

⁵³⁰ Attaleiates, p. 183; Skylitzes, II, p. 708; Bryennius, p. 147; Zonaras, III, p. 709.

⁵³¹ Bryennius, p. 135; Psellus, *Chronographia*, VII. 31-32, pp. 363-4; Attaleiates, pp. 173-4.

⁵³² Cecaumenos, p. 95.

1049. The fundamental distinction, though, between these two cases is that Hérve commanded a division of fellow Franks under the command of a Byzantine general-in-command against foreign invaders (Patzinak invasion of 1049). Crispin, on the other hand, participated in civil conflicts, having the full support of an Emperor that the rest of the Byzantine generals quite possibly would not have had, and apparently he was the dominant figure in Andronicus Doukas' army in 1072, inspiring admiration not only by his men but from Byzantine troops as well.⁵³³

The most famous of the Franks to have been employed by Constantinople in the second half of the eleventh century was Roussel of Bailleuil. He, along with Geoffrey Ridel the later Duke of Gaeta since 1068, was Count Roger's principal lieutenant in his Sicilian campaign. The fact that he is no longer mentioned by the "Italian" chroniclers after Cerami suggests that, around that period of standstill in the Sicilian theatre of operations, he decided to pursue a more profitable career across the Adriatic. Initially, Roussel managed to take advantage of the desperation of the local inhabitants of the areas of Lykaonia and Galatia, on the Armeniac thema, for protection against the Seljuc raids.⁵³⁴ Bryennius mentions that the locals were paying their taxes to Roussel out of a mixture of "fear and good-will", with their payments strangely being made in money.⁵³⁵ His ambitions were clearly high from the beginning of his establishment in Imperial territories, but whether from the first he had designs on the Imperial throne is uncertain.

For the Matzikert campaign, Attaliates informs us of the presence of a Frankish contingent under Roussel, probably of around five hundred knights although no numbers are provided.⁵³⁶ In the winter of 1073/4 he openly challenged the Doukades in open battle,

⁵³³ Attaleiates, pp. 173-4; Psellus, *Chronographia*, VII. 30, p. 364.

⁵³⁴ Shepard, "The Uses of the Franks", 300; A. Simpson, "Three sources of military unrest in eleventh century Asia Minor: the Norman chieftains Hérve Frankopoulos, Robert Crispin and Roussel of Bailleuil", *Mesogeios/Mediterranée*, 9-10 (2000), 194.

⁵³⁵ Bryennius, p. 187.

⁵³⁶ Attaliates, 148-9; Zonaras, III, p. 697; Haldon, *Byzantine Wars*, p. 171.

defeating Isaakios Comnenus and taking him prisoner,⁵³⁷ while he also managed to capture the Caesar John Doukas who was sent with a large army against him. Before being bought off by Michael VII and sent back to his estates in the Armeniac thema to defend the Empire's collapsing borders, he had managed to raise John Doukas as a rival claimant to the Imperial throne.⁵³⁸ By that time, his estates and thus his power had been greatly increased and he was seen as one of the most powerful nobles in north-eastern Asia Minor.⁵³⁹

Roussel found in the face of Alexius Comnenus a cunning and much more formidable rival. Alexius was sent in Amaseia (autumn 1075) in the Armeniac thema with a meagre force, probably of a few hundred strong,⁵⁴⁰ to deal with Roussel once and for all. The young general resorted to the plundering of Roussel's estates and the besieging of the principal cities under his control, thus denying him his source of revenue while avoiding a pitched battle.⁵⁴¹ Having very few soldiers in his disposal to even consider a battle, his choice of reducing the enemy's strongholds must have been his only option at the time, and although it seemed to work for a while, at least according to the *Alexiad*, the key to victory lay with the Seljuks and with the side that would manage to buy them as allies.⁵⁴²

Eventually, Roussel was captured by the Turks and handed over to Alexius, with Anna Comnena writing about the famous incident with the inhabitants of Amaseia, where the

⁵³⁷ For Roussel's 1073/4 rebellion, see: Attaleiates, pp. 183ff.; Skylitzes, II, p. 708; *Alexiad*, I, i, pp. 13-4; Sewter, p. 32.

⁵³⁸ Roussel's army must have been around 2,700-3,000 men: Attaleiates, pp. 183-93; Zonaras, III, pp. 709-712; Skylitzes, II, pp. 708-9.

⁵³⁹ *Alexiad*, I, i, p. 14; Sewter, p. 32.

⁵⁴⁰ Bryennius, p. 185; Simpson, "Three sources of military unrest", 196.

⁵⁴¹ *Alexiad*, I, ii, p. 16; Sewter, p. 33.

⁵⁴² Anna gives us the letter sent by Alexius to Tutush, the Seljuk chieftain, where we can clearly see his ability to act as a diplomat, and indeed a cunning one, with impressive results. His understanding of the geopolitical situation in Asia Minor in connection with the interests that each party, meaning the Byzantines, the Seljuks and Roussel, had in the region is admirable. See: *Alexiad*, I, ii, pp. 16-7; Sewter, pp. 33-4; See also: Bryennius, pp. 187-9; Attaleiates, pp. 199-200.

Imperial force had been stationed, rioting and even trying to set the captured Frank free.⁵⁴³ Was it because the Frankish army provided better protection to the local population than the official Byzantine authorities, or maybe because the locals were used in doing business with the foreigners? Probably both, if we consider Alexius' precautionary measure of sweeping off the remaining Frankish garrisons from the neighbouring areas before returning to the capital with his valuable prisoner, in case of the province falling back to the previous *status quo*, primarily due to the extensive support Roussel had enjoyed in the area from the local Byzantine and Armenian element.⁵⁴⁴ It is significant that Roussel had not confiscated or plundered any of the domains of the "wealthy" nobles of the Armeniac thema,⁵⁴⁵ fearful that they would turn against him and call either the Emperor or, even worse, the Seljucs.

Undoubtedly, the period of Alexius' maturing years, meaning the collapsing period of the 1070s when the latter was a young officer in the service of the Doukas family, must have taught him a lot about how to deal with mercenaries, and especially the Westerners. In a significant change of tactics towards them, he may have allowed some of them to have their own commander after becoming an Emperor, but Constantine Humbertopoulos, a nephew of Robert Guiscard, had been living in Byzantium for a long time, and judging from his Orthodox-Greek name he was not a newcomer who had raised his own followers in a distant Imperial province, but rather a trusted Imperial officer who actively assisted Alexius' rise to the throne.⁵⁴⁶ Humbertopoulos also took part in the 1081 campaign against Robert Guiscard's siege of Dyrrachium, commanding a "regiment of Franks".⁵⁴⁷

The increasing dependence of the central government of Constantinople on mercenary forces can be seen as the response to a combination of factors whose detailed examination is

⁵⁴³ *Alexiad*, I. ii, pp. 17-9; Sewter, pp. 34-5.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I. iv, pp. 24-5; Sewter, pp. 36-7.

⁵⁴⁵ Bryennius, p. 187.

⁵⁴⁶ *Alexiad*, II. iv-v, pp. 93-104; Sewter, pp. 81-2; Shepard, "The Uses of the Franks", 303-4.

⁵⁴⁷ *Alexiad*, IV. iv, p. 199; Sewter, p. 141.

beyond the scope of this chapter. The extensive frontier areas inherited by seven decades of expansionist policy had to be manned by all-seasoned, professional and well-trained troops, something for which the thematic troops were incapable of doing. Western mercenaries – because it was the Franks who were employed on a permanent basis – were the cheapest and most efficient solution to a period of economic troubles and coin debasement. Since their first appearance outside the walls of Constantinople, in 1047, they were serving the Emperors in all operational theatres most of the times by manning castles and strategic towns in Armenia, Cilicia and Bulgaria – crucial frontier regions of the Empire. They were predominantly cavalry, numbering a few hundreds and since the early 1050s they had their own leaders, with the most renowned those of Hérve, Robert Crispin and Roussel of Bailleuil. However, the long-established view of them being the main cause for numerous rebellions throughout the centuries has been challenged by a recent series of studies.⁵⁴⁸ Indeed, as we saw in this chapter there were Frankish leaders whose ambitions went far beyond that of a faithful employee, but if we carefully look at the political context of those rebellions which would have included indigenous troops as well, then the situation becomes different. Would any rebellions have been mounted if Nicephoros Phocas or Basil II was on the throne? Probably not! The Varangian Guard never rebelled against an Emperor since the 980s and were, in fact, the most elite unit of the Byzantine Army. These mercenaries filled a crucial gap in the Byzantine Army's battle-field effectiveness, the Franks by providing elite cavalry battalions that seemed to gradually replace the tagmatic units of the *kataphraktoi*, and the Varangians by manning strategic towns in Armenia and the Balkans against important enemies of the Empire, a task that was assigned – since the seventh century – to the thematic soldiers now seriously neglected by the central government.

⁵⁴⁸ Shepard, “The Uses of the Franks”; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 85-93.

5. The structure and operational role of the Byzantine Navy in the tenth and eleventh centuries

As a maritime power controlling several sea-routes in the eastern Mediterranean, the Byzantine Empire needed an effective naval force to dominate the seas and coordinate with the land armies in any defensive or expansionist campaign. In the case of southern Italy and especially Dyrrachium, the role of the Imperial Navy was crucial in protecting the coasts and enforcing an effective naval blockade on the invading Norman army both in 1081 and 1107/8. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to present the basic structural units of the navy, their ships and crews and their fighting tactics and to examine their decline after the end of Basil II's expansionist wars along with the attempts to revive it by Alexius Comnenus in the 1090s.

The structure of the Byzantine navy allowed it to play both a defensive and an offensive role, depending on the policy shaped by the central government. The three major units of the Imperial navy, established in the early eighth century, consisted of an "Imperial" fleet, an elite unit based primarily at Constantinople and commanded by a *droungarios tou ploimou* (*δρουγγάριος του πλοίμου*); the fleets of the marine themes of the Cibyrreots, Samos and Aegean Sea, each under their *strategoï*; and the provincial fleets of the rest of the coastal themes of the Empire, small squadrons that had as their main duty the policing of the coasts and major ports, each under a *turmarch* or an *archon* (*άρχων*).

The Imperial Fleet was established in the aftermath of the first Arab siege of Constantinople (674-8) and played a very similar role to the tagmatic units of the Army ever since. Its units were responsible for the defence of the coastal areas neighbouring the capital as well as for its port and maritime traffic; for the policing and monitoring of the traffic in the major maritime routes of the Empire; for providing assistance to the provincial fleets of the non-maritime coastal themes; for the neutralization of enemy corsair activity; for providing transportation for the land armies in large-scale campaigns and undertaking naval expeditions

against enemy naval bases.⁵⁴⁹ Like the tagmata, the Imperial Fleet was built and equipped in the capital and also had the same structure with them,⁵⁵⁰ and by the early tenth century it had 4,000 marines and 19,600 oarsmen.⁵⁵¹ The themes of the Cibyrreots (est. 674 – renamed in 727), Aegean Sea (est. around 843) and Samos (est. during Basil I's reign) were the only clearly maritime themes (*θέματα πλόιμα* or *πλοϊμόθεμα*).⁵⁵² They were built and equipped in the theme itself, with their numbers varying between 600-1,000 marines and 4,000-6,000 oarsmen.⁵⁵³ The operational roles that the units of the thematic navy were to undertake were clearly for the defence and policing of the coastal areas and ports under their jurisdiction; to keep the sea-routes safe for navigation, neutralise whatever corsair activity in their patrolling area and secure and control the trading activities in all the major ports of the thema.

These coastal themata that were never upgraded to the level of a maritime one were the themata of Hellas (689), Peloponnesus (800s), Cephalonia (800s), Thessaloniki (before 836), Nicopolis (before 845), Dyrrachium (before 845) and Longobardia (902),⁵⁵⁴ with about 2,000

⁵⁴⁹ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 46-7; C. Papatotiriou, *Βυζαντινή Υψηλή Στρατηγική, 6^{ος}-11^{ος} αιώνας*, Ποιότητα, Athens, 2001, pp. 199-202.

⁵⁵⁰ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XIX. 23.

⁵⁵¹ *De Administrando Imperio*, 51/90-92, p. 250; Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, Appendix I, p. 403; Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, p. 76 and especially Table 2 on p. 67.

⁵⁵² These terms appear in: *De Ceremoniis*, pp. 656, 662, 668.

⁵⁵³ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, p. 76; Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, Appendix I, pp. 397-407.

⁵⁵⁴ In the parentheses I have put the date of their establishments as themata or, for the case of Dyrrachium and Nicopolis, their mentioning in the *Taktikon Uspenskij* (845-56). See: G. Ostrogorsky, *Taktikon Uspenskij und Taktikon Benesevic, Zur Frage ihrer Entstehungszeit*, Zbornik radova, v. II, 1953; Ferluga dates the establishment of the theme of Dyrrachium as early as the 820s, and probably even before the 815, based on letters from Theodore the Stoudites: J. Ferluga, "Sur la Date de la Creation du Thème de Dyrrachium", *Byzantium on the Balkans, Studies on the Byzantine Administration and the Southern Slavs from the VIIth to the XIIIth Centuries*, Hakkert, Amsterdam, 1976, pp. 215-24; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 210-217; Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 71-92.

men each.⁵⁵⁵ The non-maritime coastal themata possessed their own naval squadrons for the security of their coasts, ports and maritime commerce, thus being a flotilla of rather light ships not suitable for open-sea expeditions. These ships were built in Constantinople and controlled by the central government. The crews of the provincial fleet were recruited from all the parts of the Empire, mainly though from the coastal areas of the Aegean and southern Asia Minor. Further, they were equipped and paid by the central government.⁵⁵⁶ Apart from the *drungarie* and the *turmarch*, two offices which were, theoretically, inferior to the office of the *strategos*, there was also the command of the *archon-abydikos* (*ἀρχων-αβυδικός*). This middle-rank official was in command of an important naval base or a major thematic port, like for example Dyrrachium, Thessaloniki, Corinth, and Chandax. He commanded a small squadron of light ships to control the maritime traffic.⁵⁵⁷

The Byzantine warships of the main period and their naval tactics

The typical high-seas elite warship of the Empire in this period was the *dromon*.⁵⁵⁸ This was a two-masted fully decked bireme with two banks of oars, one rowed from below the deck and one from above it. There were twenty-five oarsmen on each side of each deck, thus raising the total number of oarsmen to a hundred, all fully seated. The marines and the officers of the ship amounted to around fifty men, while the *ousia* (*ουσία*), the standard complement of a war galley (its crew excluding the marines and the officers) totalled 108 men.⁵⁵⁹ An almost identical type of warship, which might frustrate us due to its different

⁵⁵⁵ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 66-69, especially Table 2 in p. 67.

⁵⁵⁶ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, p. 110.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 54-62, 85-93, 163-70.

⁵⁵⁸ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XIX; *De Ceremoniis*, I, pp. 669-678.

⁵⁵⁹ Pryor, Jeffreys, *The Age of the Δρόμων*, pp. 123-34, 254-55; J.H. Pryor, "Byzantium and the Sea: Byzantine Fleets and the History of the Empire in the Age of the Macedonian Emperors, c.900-1025 ce", *War at Sea in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Boydell, Woodbridge, 2003, pp. 85-6; T. Korres, «Υγρόν Πύρον», *Ένα όπλο της βυζαντινής ναυτικής*

name, was the *chelandion*.⁵⁶⁰ But although the Greek primary sources use the two terms indiscriminately,⁵⁶¹ it is interesting to mention that Theophanes, a ninth century chronicler, identifies the chelandia as horse-transporters.⁵⁶² Compared to the dromon and the chelandion, a smaller but much faster type of ship was the *galea*. Based on the same design mentality of a war ship, the *galea* had two sails (the one amidships being smaller by a third) and probably one bank of oars on the deck.⁵⁶³ Because of its speed, however, this type of ship was used primarily for courier service and, during campaigns, for the transport of orders (*μαντάτα*). There is also certain mentioning of *galeai* being used in espionage.⁵⁶⁴

Regarding the horse-transport units of the Byzantine Fleet, since the early tenth century they were equipped with a *climaca* (*κλίμακα*), a ramp for the uploading and unloading of the horses from the ship's gunwales, either from the stern but usually from the bow. This term is mentioned in the *De Ceremoniis* for the Cretan expeditions of 911, 949 and 960/1⁵⁶⁵ and reveals the necessary modifications to the ships when they had to carry horses, like hatches not just in the sides but also in the decks leading down into the holds,⁵⁶⁶ while further modifications would have taken place in the hull of the ship concerning the stabling of the

τακτικής, Vanias, Thessaloniki, 1995, pp. 83-90; K. Alexandris, *Η Θαλάσσια δύναμις εἰς την ιστορία της Βυζαντινῆς Αυτοκρατορίας*, Athens, 1956, p. 79.

⁵⁶⁰ Both Ahrweiler and Pryor consider these two types to be almost identical, see: Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, Appendix II, pp. 412-3; Pryor, "Byzantium and the Sea", 85-6.

⁵⁶¹ The Arabic primary sources use only the term *chelandion* to describe the Byzantine warships: Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, Appendix II, footnote 3, p. 412

⁵⁶² Theophanes Continuates, p. 471; certain Greek historians believe that the *chelandia* were used primarily for transport, although their design allowed them to be used in battle as well. See: Korres, «Υγρόν Πύρ», p. 85; Alexandris, *Η Θαλάσσια δύναμις*, pp. 73-4.

⁵⁶³ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XIX. 9.

⁵⁶⁴ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, Appendix II, p. 414; Pryor, Jeffreys, *The Age of the Δρόμων*, pp. 190, 396; Vegetius also writes about the use of camouflage techniques: Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, IV. 37.

⁵⁶⁵ *De Ceremoniis*, pp. 658-59; Leo the Deacon, p. 7; *The History of Leo the Deacon*, pp. 60-1.

⁵⁶⁶ Pryor, Jeffreys, *The Age of the Δρόμων*, pp. 309-10.

horses. As Professor Pryor concludes, in his pioneering study for the construction of a Byzantine horse-transport ship, the chelandia were indeed specialized horse transports, able to carry between 12-20 horses,⁵⁶⁷ but they must have been constructed differently to dromons when it comes to the dimensions of the ship's beam, which would have been much wider to accommodate both the lower bank oarsmen and the horses.⁵⁶⁸ A significant structural difference between the tenth century Byzantine transport ships and their Italian counterparts in the twelfth century was that the latter had placed both banks of oarsmen on the upper deck, thus making more room for the horses in the ship's hull.

Turning to the battle tactics of the Byzantine Navy, the existence of an above-water beak in the major warships reveals a fundamental difference between the ancient Greek and Roman naval tactics and those used by the Byzantine navy, at least after the early tenth century. This beak that replaced the below-water ram, possibly as early as the sixth century, proves the change in the objective of naval engagements, from penetrating the enemy ship's hull below the water line to damaging the ship's oars and upper hull and bring it to a stop in order to board and capture it or burn it.⁵⁶⁹ And by the seventh century their main attacking weapon, which was primarily used by the units of the Imperial Fleet,⁵⁷⁰ was the famous

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 325-30; for the purpose of comparison, a fourth century BC Greek horse transport (*ναυς ιππαγωγός*), rowed by 60 oarsmen, could carry 30 horses. See: L. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, Princeton, 1971, p. 93.

⁵⁶⁸ Pryor, Jeffrey, *The Age of the Δρόμων*, pp. 315-25.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 134-152, 382-4; Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War*, p. 59; "Byzantium and the Sea", 97-103; the naval battle of Dhat as-Sawari (655) was also a turning point in this change of naval tactics: V. Christides, "The Naval Battle of Dhat as-Sawari A.H. 34/ A.D. 655-656. A Classical Example of Naval Warfare Incompetence", *Byzantina*, 13 (1985), 1331-45.

⁵⁷⁰ About the Muslim use of the Greek Fire and how this knowledge passed over to the Muslims: D. Haldane, "The Fire-ship of Al-Salih Ayyub and Muslim Use of "Greek Fire"", *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages*, ed. D.J.Kagay, L.J.A. Villalon, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1999, 137-44; V. Christides, "Naval History and Naval Technology in Medieval Times, the Need for Interdisciplinary Studies", *Byzantion*, 58 (1988), 321-2.

Greek Fire, a flammable mixture which was projected through a siphon at the prow.⁵⁷¹ Concerning the naval tactics which should have been used by the Byzantines, according to Emperor Leo VI's *Tactica*,⁵⁷² we can see the same spirit that had dominated the advices given to a Byzantine general in the previous chapters of his work. We read here just a few of the most basic of Leo's advices to an admiral:

“During an invasion by an enemy fleet, you should be aware of the enemy's numbers and types of ships and also of the weather and the place where the naval battle is to be fought. If all of these work to your favour, only then you should engage the enemy.”⁵⁷³

When a decision to engage into battle was decided by the senior officers, then the Byzantine fleet could deploy its forces in two basic formations,⁵⁷⁴ depending on the circumstances:

“You should deploy your forces in a semi-circle formation, and in the wings of the formation, left and right, you should put the best and most powerful of your dromons. In the middle-

⁵⁷¹ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XIX. 6; for an indicative bibliography on the Greek Fire: J. Haldon, M., Byrne, “A Possible Solution to the Problem of Greek Fire”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 70 (1977), 91-99; A. Roland, “Secrecy, Technology, and War: Greek Fire and the Defense of Byzantium, 678-1204”, *Warfare in the Dark Ages*, ed. J. France and K. DeVries, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2008, 655-79; Korres, «Υγρόν Πύρ»; Pryor, Jeffreys, *The Age of the Δρόμων*, Appendix VI, pp. 607-631.

⁵⁷² See also the work of Nicephoros Ouranos, who paraphrases Leo's *Tactica*: Nicephoros Ouranos, “On Fighting at Sea”, in *The Age of the Δρόμων*, Appendix V, pp. 572-604; along with our third manual on naval warfare: Syrianos Magistros, “Naval Battles of Syrianos Magistros”, in *The Age of the Δρόμων*, Appendix I, pp. 456-480

⁵⁷³ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XIX. 43; A clearly Vegetian spirit of caution and prudence which characterises Leo's work for the infantry as well as the navy.

⁵⁷⁴ There are several other tactics like faked retreat and counterattack using small and fast ships, surprise night attack and a list of others. See: *Ibid.*, XIX. 47-49

hollow part of the formation it is you who should be there, to observe and command everything. [...] This formation is deployed to avoid encirclement by the enemy.”⁵⁷⁵

This is also, supposedly, the best formation to overtake the enemy’s wings by attacking these particular units from the side or rear where they were most vulnerable to *Greek Fire*.

“You should deploy your forces in full-frontal attack against the enemy, so when the need arises you will be able to attack your enemy’s forces from the rear, and you will burn their ships with fire from the siphons.”⁵⁷⁶

Once the admiral had given the signal to attack the enemy formation, the Byzantine squadrons would move towards the enemy and when they would get into close distance they would attack the enemy ships and their crews with bows and arrows, snakes, lizards and other dangerous reptiles, pots with burning lime or tar and, of course, with Greek Fire⁵⁷⁷ projected either through the ship’s siphons, through small hand-siphons or thrown against the enemies in a form of small hand-grenades.⁵⁷⁸ When the ships were close enough, boarding detachments were sent at the enemy ship and the result of the naval battle largely depended on the courage and the fighting abilities of the boarding teams. For that reason the admiral should keep in his warships “courageous soldiers who are strong when fighting with the sword, and they have a daring soul and are also well trained and disciplined.”⁵⁷⁹

The decline of the Byzantine Navy during the period of the *Epigonoï* (1025-1081)

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., XIX. 44

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., XIX. 45

⁵⁷⁷ The Greek Fire could be used effectively against enemy formations only when the fleet was staging a frontal attack. For the reasons behind that, see: Korres, «*Υγρόν Πυρ*», p. 88

⁵⁷⁸ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XIX. 51-60

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid., XIX. 65

In the period of the “Reconquest” the Empire had managed to expand its borders to a degree that it had not been seen since the times of Justinian. However, the *pax romana* that had been established in the Byzantine seas turned the attention of the central government away from the seas, with severe consequences, especially for the units of the Imperial Fleet. The role of the Navy, from this period onwards, was to police the coastline and control the maritime traffic rather than to launch large-scale offensive operations against enemies like the Muslims. Consequently the dromon fleets were steadily neglected in favour of the provincial light-ship squadrons. The Empire, relying on her land armies, lost the opportunity to effectively control the international maritime routes and dominate the Mediterranean.⁵⁸⁰

During the first half of the eleventh century, the Byzantine navy’s history is linked with the Empire’s distant province of Longobardia, with two large-scale expeditions being organised to expel the Kalbite Muslims from Sicily. The degree of decline of the Imperial Fleet can be seen, in this period, by the fact that units from the themes of Cephalonia and Samos were mobilized for the 1025 Sicilian expedition instead of the dromons and the chelandia from Constantinople.⁵⁸¹ But it was not before the rise to the throne of Romanus III (1028-34) that a long-term strategy against the Muslims began to take shape and, as a consequence, the construction of a high-seas fleet seemed imperative.⁵⁸² This policy, however, took a serious blow when Skylitzes writes of a fire in the capital’s naval base that burned all the dromons that were stationed there (1035).⁵⁸³ The decline of the Imperial Fleet was so serious that there were practically no ships to defend the capital from Vladimir’s boats in 1043.⁵⁸⁴ Regarding the fleets of the naval themata (Cibyrraeots, Aegean Sea and Samos), we see the steady decline in their crews and numbers throughout this period. In the 1040s is the last mentioning of the Cibyrraeots in the primary sources, when they participated in the

⁵⁸⁰ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 117-8.

⁵⁸¹ Skylitzes, II, p. 457.

⁵⁸² Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, p. 123.

⁵⁸³ Skylitzes, II, p. 529.

⁵⁸⁴ “και επει μη ετυχε το ναυτικόν ενδημούν, πορρωτάτω δ’όν φυλακαίς χωρών προσησχόλητο”. See: Zonaras, III, p. 632; Psellus, *Chronographia*, VI, pp. 199-203.

crushing of a revolt in Cyprus, in 1042,⁵⁸⁵ and they fought against the Russian fleet in the waters of Constantinople in 1043, a naval battle that virtually eliminated their strength.⁵⁸⁶ In the same period, the two other naval themata of Samos and the Aegean Sea, like the Cibyrreots, were transformed into civil administrative provinces, as it was the case with the land themata of Asia Minor.

The Imperial Navy of Alexius Comnenus (1081-1108)

After his rise to the throne on the 1st April 1081 Alexius Comnenus had to deal with two enemies in two different parts of the Empire, the Normans in the Balkans and the Seljuks of Rum in Asia Minor. Alexius wisely chose to deal with the Normans first, after concluding a peace treaty with the Seljuks, recognising that the latter posed a much more serious threat to the Empire and had to be dealt with in the long-term. The role of intercepting any Norman invasion fleet would probably have been assigned to the provincial fleets of Dyrrachium, Cephalonia and, perhaps, Nicopolis. But the major naval bases in Cephalonia, Dyrrachium and Corfu had been abandoned,⁵⁸⁷ thus allowing only a small squadron of ships to patrol the area with no immediate effect.

In the Aegean Sea and the Bosphorus, the large naval bases of the Imperial navy in Crete (Chandax), the Cyclades and the Dodecanese islands were either severely undermanned or deserted,⁵⁸⁸ while Alexius Comnenus did not have any ships at his disposal when he attempted to reclaim the Bithynian coasts opposite the capital from the Turks in 1081. Anna Comnena only mentions a number of *παρατυχόντα ακάτια* (random small boats – skiffs) being used to transfer the troops opposite the Bosphorus.⁵⁸⁹ By the beginning of the 1090s the

⁵⁸⁵ Skylitzes, II, p. 550.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 554.

⁵⁸⁷ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, p. 179.

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 179-81.

⁵⁸⁹ *Alexiad*, III. xi, p. 179; Sewter, p. 129 .

situation got even worse with the establishment of a number of semi-independent Turkish Emirates in the Aegean coast of Asia Minor, the most notable being that in Smyrne under the ambitious Tzachas.⁵⁹⁰ The latter allied himself with the Patzinaks in a failed attack against Constantinople in 1090/1,⁵⁹¹ but it seems that this very serious threat of the joint land and naval attack, along with a series of revolts in the important naval bases of Crete and Cyprus the following summer (1091),⁵⁹² alerted the government and for the first time we see long-term plans for the revival of the Imperial Navy. This new fleet was to have a new command under the *logothesion of the ploimon* (*λογοθέσιο του πλόιμου*).⁵⁹³

The fleet was ready in the summer of 1094 and it was placed under the overall command of the Grand Drungarie of the Fleet, John Doukas. Thus, the firm hold of the Imperial authority was re-established in Crete and Cyprus, in areas of the west coast of Asia Minor along with a number of islands of the eastern Aegean like Chios, Samos, Mitylene and Rhodes, marking an era of relative peace in the Aegean Sea.⁵⁹⁴ This new Byzantine fleet was also patrolling the Illyrian coasts in the summer of 1097 during the crossing of the Crusaders' army from Apulia. These naval units were under the command of John, the Duke-Katepano of Dyrrachium, and the Grand Duke Nicolaos Mavrokatalon, and although we cannot be sure

⁵⁹⁰ Tzachas had been a prisoner of Nicephorus Botaneiates in the capital and, probably, quite familiar with the tactics of the Byzantine navy.

⁵⁹¹ For Tzachas and a detailed description of his fleet, see: *Alexiad*, VII. viii, pp. 361-9; Sewter, pp. 233-6; Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, vol. II, pp. 23-4; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 359-60; Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 184-5.

⁵⁹² Zonaras, III, p. 737; *Alexiad*, IX. ii, pp. 430-1; Sewter, pp. 272-4; P. Frankopan, "Challenges to imperial authority in Byzantium: Revolts on Crete and Cyprus at the end of the 11th Century", *Byzantion*, 74 (2004), 382-402; P. Gautier, "Defection et soumission de la Crete sous Alexis Ier Comnene", *Revue des Etudes Byzantines*, 35 (1977), 215-27.

⁵⁹³ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, p. 203.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-87.

about their numbers or types of their ships, they performed well in their duties assigned by the Emperor.⁵⁹⁵

The difference between the naval forces that Alexius Comnenus could mobilize in 1081 and fifteen years later, when his squadrons enforced an efficient naval blockade in Bohemond's base, is significant and it can be attributed, in a grossly oversimplified comment, to the stability in the Empire's political affairs which further allowed the commerce and, thus, the economy to recover to a certain degree.⁵⁹⁶ The Empire was now firmly in control of the waters and the maritime routes of the Ionian, south Adriatic, Aegean and eastern Mediterranean Seas and with the Fatimid Caliphate in a serious decline at least for the last half a century – it was to be revived by Saladin later in the century – it was only the rise of other maritime powers of Italy that could threaten her dominance.⁵⁹⁷ The city that posed the most serious threat to Alexius' plans for naval supremacy was Pisa and it was to be her massive naval expedition to the Levant, in the summer of 1099, which was to attract Alexius' attention. Some 900 ships⁵⁹⁸ that were bound to Syria plundered the islands of Corfu, Zakynthos, Leukada and Cephalonia and later clashed with a Byzantine naval squadron off Rhodes. This threat caused the construction of a second fleet, which was to be commanded by the experienced Lombard Landulf, which significantly reinforced the Imperial forces at

⁵⁹⁵ For the new offices of the Duke-Katepano and the Grand Duke: Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 199-210; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 149-51.

⁵⁹⁶ My objective is not to analyse the marked recovery of the Byzantine economy during the reign of Alexius Comnenus. For more details on this topic, see: Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, pp. 277-320; A. Harvey, *Economic expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989; M. Whittow, "The Middle Byzantine Economy (600-1200)", *C.H.B.E.*, 473-76.

⁵⁹⁷ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, pp. 192-3; Lewis, Runyan, *European Naval and Maritime History*, pp. 32-33, 52.

⁵⁹⁸ An exaggerated comment by Anna. More likely 120 ships according to Albert of Aachen and the *Annales Pisani*. See: *Alexiad*, XI. x, vol. II, p. 115; Sewter, pp. 360-1; Albert of Aachen, VI. 55, p. 476, although Albert erroneously talks about both the Pisans and the Genoese; *Gli Annales Pisani*, *RIS*, vol. 6, part II, ed. B. Maragone, N. Zanichelli, Bologna, 1930, s.a. 1099, p. 7; Andrea Dandolo, *Chronicon*, *RIS*, vol. 12, s.a. 1100, pp. 221-2.

Constantinople and the oriental squadrons in Crete and Cyprus against the Norman-Genoese alliance of the period 1101-4.⁵⁹⁹ So, what would characterise Alexius' state policy from the 1090s onwards is a combination of policy from the times of the Isaurian (717-802) and Macedonian (867-1025) dynasties, meaning an offensive policy for the reconquest of old imperial territories, the predominance of army officers in the central and provincial administration and the revival of a strong and centralised land and naval armies.

⁵⁹⁹ Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer*, p. 193.

6. The political and military organization of Byzantine Italy before the arrival of the Normans

Before I begin with my analysis of the military organization of Byzantine Longobardia, I believe it is important that I should first present the geography of Apulia and Calabria so that the reader would have a clear understanding of the political and military developments in southern Italy. The terrain and the geography of the areas where military operations took place is extremely significant and they certainly affected the course of invading armies, thus the closer we study the topography of a region the better we can understand the strategic decisions that take place.

Apulia's northern limits are fixed by the lower Fortore River, with the area between the rivers Fortore and Ofanto been known by its Byzantine name – Capitanata (modern Foggia). To the east, the Capitanata forms a fertile lowland peninsula, the Gargano. Between Ofanto and the Brindisi-Taranto line, we have central Apulia which is blocked to the west by the southern Apennines. Most of the cities in this area were – and still are – situated in the shoreline, not just for reasons of commerce with Mediterranean ports, but most importantly due to the rough ground of limestone and the absence of any rivers in the Apulian interior.⁶⁰⁰ The Via Appia, one of the oldest and most strategic military roads built by the Romans in the late fourth century BC, connected Rome with Brindisi via the Apulian countryside and along with the Via Traiana, an extension of the Via Appia through Benevento and coastal Apulia, is strategically connected to the Via Egnatia that reached Constantinople.⁶⁰¹ The Basilicata (modern Lucania) between the River Bradano to the north and the Monte Pollino massif in the south is the most mountainous region of southern Italy, an inhospitable terrain with unreliable rainfall and dry rivers for half a year. Finally, the Terra d'Otranto (modern Lecce province) is a rock of limestone that divides the Adriatic from the Ionian Seas.

⁶⁰⁰ D.S. Walker, *A Geography of Italy*, Methuen & Co, London, 1967, pp. 204-5.

⁶⁰¹ K. Belke, "Communications, Roads and Bridges", *O.H.B.S.*, 296; N.H.H. Sitwell, *Roman Roads of Europe*, London, 1981.

Calabria retains the same contrast with Apulia regarding the inland and coastal areas. There are two great plateaus that dominate the Peninsula, the Sila between the valleys of the rivers Crati and Amato (1,929 metres), and the Aspromonte plateau (1,956 metres) in the southern tip. The majority of the plateaus were forested with black pines and oaks. Most of northern Calabria and the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic coastline have been ideal for agriculture due to their terrain – clay and sand – and mild climate, contrary to the severe winter in the plateaus.⁶⁰² Thus all the major towns in our period have been built either in the valleys of the rivers Crati and Amato or in the southern coastal areas.

Throughout the tenth century the borders between the Byzantine territories in Apulia and Calabria and the Lombard principalities of Capua-Benevento (one state between 900-75) and Salerno remained relatively stable. This was mostly because of the lack of sufficient resources directed to Italy by Constantinople and the inability of the Lombard princes to destabilise the Byzantine rule in Apulia.⁶⁰³ The only territorial gain for the Empire was the Capitanata in the first decade of the eleventh century. Thus, on the eve of the Norman arrival in southern Italy the Byzantine holdings comprised of two principal areas. First, the province of Sicily, consisting of territories under Byzantine rule in Sicily itself (up to 902) and the Calabrian peninsula. Second, there was the newly established province of Longobardia which was separated from the naval thema of Cephalaria by Leo VI in 902. Longobardia had a mixed population, with the southernmost tip in the Terra d'Otranto being predominantly Greek, but the rest of the province was mostly Lombard, especially in the border areas with the Abruzzi. Calabria was mainly Greek, with the exception of the Basilicata in the north-east which included some scattered Lombard elements.⁶⁰⁴

⁶⁰² Walker, *A Geography of Italy*, p. 213.

⁶⁰³ Periodic expeditions by the Byzantine *strategoi* (956, 969) only achieved short-term recognition of the Byzantine authority.

⁶⁰⁴ Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 489-532; G.A. Loud, "Byzantine Italy and the Normans", *Proceedings of the XVIII Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston, Amsterdam, 1988, 215-33; *Robert Guiscard*, 48-59; V. von Falkenhausen, "Between Two

Although Longobardia and Calabria were seen as a distant and not so important frontier area of the Empire, it formed a part – a peripheral one no doubt – of a highly centralised governmental organisation. Based on that, there is no evidence to suggest that these two provinces were not organised as themata in more or less the same fashion as all the other provinces of the Empire.⁶⁰⁵ Thus, both military and administrative authority was exercised by the strategos of the thema, based in Bari for Longobardia and at Reggio for Calabria. The second in command – governor of a smaller administrative area – was the turmarch,⁶⁰⁶ while in Apulia other local offices are also occasionally mentioned like *gastald*, *topoteretes* and *ek prosopou* (literally, a representative).⁶⁰⁷ Emperor Nicephoros Phocas upgraded the thema of Longobardia to a Catepanate⁶⁰⁸ in 969, as a response to Otto I's invasion of Apulia and Calabria in 968 and recognising the significance of the south-eastern coasts of Italy in controlling the entrance of the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, especially Bari's importance as a commercial centre for the south Adriatic.⁶⁰⁹

Estimating the actual numbers deployed in an average Byzantine thema after 1025 is a very difficult task. But even trying to assess the numerical strength of Longobardia in the beginning of the tenth century also poses a significant number of problems, mostly due to lack of sufficient primary material. The thema of Sicily, the predecessor of the thema of Calabria dating back to the era of Justinian, it must have been one of the typical western

Empires: Byzantine Italy in the Reign of Basil II", *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. P. Magdalino, Brill, Leiden, 2003, 139.

⁶⁰⁵ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 29-30; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, p. 86.

⁶⁰⁶ Gay, *L'Italie Meridionale*, p. 415; the only non-Greek Catepan in Byzantine Italy's history was Argyrus, see: *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1051; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1051.

⁶⁰⁷ Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 705-6.

⁶⁰⁸ In the beginning of the eleventh century *Catepan* came to mean the equivalent of a *Duke*, a higher office than a *strategos*. See: Gay, *L'Italie Meridionale*, pp. 348-9. For the significance of Longobardia's military and civil upgrade: Von Falkenhausen, "Byzantine Italy", 140.

⁶⁰⁹ For more on Bari and its commerce, see: P. Skinner, "Room for tension: urban life in Apulia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries", *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 65 (1998), 159-77.

themata. This means that it should have had at least a 1,000-men drungus, and also bearing in mind that the *Tacticon Uspensky* ranks it between themata of 2,000-men, it is likely that Sicily and Calabria may have had a 1.000-men drungus each by the end of the ninth century.⁶¹⁰ Throughout the tenth century, the significant losses inflicted by the Arab naval raids in Calabria during the second half of the century might have been compensated by the re-deployment of troops from Sicily, so the speculation that the thema of Calabria might have had a 1,000-men drungus by the turn of the eleventh century seems quite sensible. On the other hand, the thema of Longobardia was newly established, created from the few territories the Empire possessed in the Terra d'Otranto by the 870s. Officially, it was separated by the thema of Cephalonia in 902 and if we consider that Cephalonia had a 1,000-men drungus, having lost half of its manpower six years earlier (896) due to the establishment of the thema of Nicopolis, it is difficult to say whether Longobardia would have had more than 1,000 men available to be deployed.⁶¹¹ These soldiers would have been Sicilian veterans, while it is almost certain that settlers from Asia Minor and the Balkans were introduced as well.⁶¹²

The military obligations of the local population to the Byzantine authorities were two. First, we have the naval service and, judging by Longobardia's status as a non-maritime coastal thema, we understand that in theory the provincial fleet of Apulia and Calabria would have been built in the capital and, thus, controlled by the central government. However, we know from the *Vita St-Nile* that the Byzantine government expected the local communities to provide a small number of ships sufficient enough for the defence-patrolling of the coasts.⁶¹³ Whether this was a well established "exception to the rule" or simply an isolated incident, we cannot be sure. It may have been an attempt by the local authorities to replace the losses inflicted on the Imperial squadrons in the failed attempt to conquer Sicily the previous year.

⁶¹⁰ Treadgold, *Byzantium and its Army*, pp. 66-7, especially Table 2 in p. 67.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 76-8.

⁶¹² Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 19.

⁶¹³ The incident of the Calabrian strategos Nicephoros Hexakionites, in 965. See: *Vita St-Nili Iunioris*, *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, vol. 70, cols. 105-7.

Whatever the case, I have not found any other example of naval squadrons from coastal themata been built locally and not in the capital. In addition, a regularly imposed military tax termed *druggaraton* is attested in this period, and judging from the name it must have been raised for the local naval forces.⁶¹⁴

In addition to the naval service, the Byzantine government had established a system of land service owed by members of the rural communities in the form of local militias. This system greatly resembles the old Lombard military and administrative system of the *gastaldes*, with the *gastald* being placed as the high official of the state demanding military service from the rural populations of his area, the *milites* who belonged to the social class of the *mediani*.⁶¹⁵ The Lombard *milites* did not own any fiefs or military equipment and horses but these were rather provided by the State as a kind of “patrimony”. Unfortunately the lack of primary material does not allow us to go deeper into the similarities of these two systems.⁶¹⁶ We know, however, that well into the eleventh century there was a strong relationship between the possession of land and military service, but we cannot provide any solid argument as to what were the criteria for someone to be called for military service.⁶¹⁷ However, it is hard to believe that it would have been a re-organization, or re-distribution, of lands as in the case of the rest of the Byzantine themata in the seventh and eighth centuries, where the general norm was for state land to be given to the *stratiotai* in exchange for military service. The commuting of the *strateia* (military service) is also attested in the last years of the tenth century and into the first decades of the eleventh.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁴ Martin, *La Pouille*, p. 712.

⁶¹⁵ For the Lombard classes of this period, see: Cahen, *La Regime Feodal*, pp. 28-30.

⁶¹⁶ The only studies been done for this subject are by: B.M. Kreutz, *Before the Normans: Southern Italy in the ninth and tenth centuries*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1991, pp. 10-16, 26-31, 56-8, 97-155; Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 226-35.

⁶¹⁷ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 35-7; Gay, *L'Italie Meridionale*, p. 367.

⁶¹⁸ Three acts established at Conversano (980), Bari (1017) and Cannes (1034). See: Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 703-4.

The typical “Italian” soldiers under Byzantine command were the *contarati* (κονταράτοι), with the most likely derivation of the term coming from the Greek *κοντάρι* (spear), meaning that these soldiers were probably armed with short spears.⁶¹⁹ These were locally raised militia-men of Lombard origin who were lightly armed, poorly trained, undisciplined and they were rarely trusted by the Byzantine authorities.⁶²⁰ They were fighting mostly on foot, which can explain the elite role that the Norman cavalry played the first four decades of their infiltration in the south. Their poor performance at Civitate in 1053 and in the three battles of 1041 is quite characteristic, when their ranks were easily broken by the Norman cavalry. We should also note that, even though in the three battles of 1041 the Byzantines had brought with them reinforcements from the mainland, including a Varangian contingent, the Lombards probably formed the nucleus of the Byzantine force. We must also not forget that Basil Boioannes chose the Normans and not the locals to man his newly and powerful fortress of Troia in 1019, undoubtedly being aware of the fighting capabilities of the Lombard troops under his orders.

During the decades that followed the defeats of the Imperial forces in 1041 and the subsequent establishment of the Normans at Melfi, the basis of the military system of the militias, the land, was eroded by the continuous expansion of the Norman principalities. Thus, the central government could rely either to reinforcements from the Balkans or to diplomacy. But with the Byzantine Army and Navy being unable to launch any serious counteroffensive in Italy, the Byzantine policy was confined to diplomatic measures. After the defeat of the Papal army at Civitate and the deterioration of the diplomatic relations between the Eastern and Western churches next year, the next step in Byzantium’s diplomatic game against its Italian rivals was to try and buy off the Norman leading counts. And as I will

⁶¹⁹ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XII. 41, 117, XIV. 28, XVIII. 37; Cecaumenos uses the term in contrast to the *ploimoi* (marines): Cecaumenos, pp. 30, 73; other Latin derivations vary: *conterranei* (fellow-countrymen) or *contracti* (those employed by contract). See: Gay, *L’Italie Meridionale*, p. 454, n. 5.

⁶²⁰ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 35-6; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 36; Gay, *L’Italie Meridionale*, p. 454.

explain in detail in a following chapter, this tactic proved effective in the short-term, but it did not avert the inevitable which was the loss of all the Imperial lands in Italy.

7. The establishment of the Normans in southern Italy and Sicily (1017-1077)

This chapter will examine the military affairs in southern Italy between 1017, the year of the famous meeting between Melus – an Apulian noble of Lombard origin and leader of a local rebellion – and a contingent of Norman pilgrims coming from the Holy Land, and the siege of Naples by the joint forces of Robert Guiscard and Richard of Capua in 1077. Major questions include: in what numbers were the Normans descending to Italy and who were their main leaders? Who were the employers of the Normans and what roles do the latter play in the military events and developments of the period? Which armies did they face in battle? Do we have any information that will help us reconstruct their battle and siege tactics? In what way were they influenced by the military tactics of their allies and enemies in southern Italy and Sicily and what degree of adaptability do we see throughout the decades? Finally, what proved to be more important for the Norman prevalence in the Italian and Sicilian operational theatres – battle tactics or numbers being drawn in the battlefield? The main objective of this chapter is to present the “military” background of the southern Italian Normans before their operations in Illyria and try to identify their strategies, battle-tactics and the development in their numbers through the studying of pitched battles, siege and naval operations in Apulia and Sicily.

The first stage of the Norman infiltration into southern Italy (1017-38)

The Lombard defeat of the rebel forces at Cannae in October 1018 certainly dashed the dreams of the rebels to oust the Byzantines from the areas of mainland Apulia and parts of the Capitanata. The coming of Basil Boioannes – after the subjugation of Bulgaria that year – proved to be the key move made by the central government which saw in him an able general and a firm leader, much needed to re-establish order in that distant province of the Empire. In this Lombard army there was a small core of Norman cavalry, numbering just a few hundreds, which participated in all the major confrontations between the rebels and the

Byzantine forces. None of the sources make clear the exact role that was played by the Normans in any of these battles, but it is almost certain that they would have been auxiliary forces kept in reserve in order to inflict a powerful blow whenever needed, mostly because they would have been the best cavalry unit the rebels would have had. But even though the Normans suffered significant casualties at Cannae, the defeat brought ample opportunities for the rest of the surviving contingents to offer their services to other employers like the Lombard principalities of Campania, the Byzantines and even the German Emperor.

During the next fifteen years after Henry II's descend to Italy to restore his influence over the Lombard principalities in spring 1022,⁶²¹ a number of serious disputes emerged between the Lombard principalities in the centre and west of Campania,⁶²² and what has to be examined is the role of the Normans in these conflicts. During these turbulent years a number of Normans were employed by Gaimar III of Salerno and Pandulf III in the siege operations against Capua (1024-26) and Naples (1028-9).⁶²³ Other Normans were installed by Henry II at Comino, north of the *Terra Sancti Benedicti*,⁶²⁴ an area that was probably granted to the principality of Capua by the German Emperor in 1022.⁶²⁵ The ranks of the Normans at Comino included Toustain (or Thorsteinn) of Begue, Gilbert, Osmund Drenkot, Asclettin, Walter of Casiny and Hugh Falluca.⁶²⁶ Some other survivors of Cannae were employed by the Prince of Benevento, while Abbot Atenulf of Montecassino had manned the fortress of Pignetano with a Norman garrison to oppose the Count of Aquino.⁶²⁷ In the decade between the fall of Naples (1029) and the Byzantine expedition in Sicily (1038), a certain Rainulf

⁶²¹ For Henry's expedition, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 67-69; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 59-66; Norwich, *The Normans in the South*, pp. 31-33.

⁶²² Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 69-72.

⁶²³ *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 38, pp. 240-1; Amatus, I, 31, 34; *Gesta*, I, 136, p. 106.

⁶²⁴ Amatus, I, 29; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 41, p. 245.

⁶²⁵ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. 67.

⁶²⁶ Amatus, I, 31; *William of Jumièges*, VII, 30; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 41, p. 245; for the Scandinavian origin of these names and their traces to Normandy, see: Menager, "Pesanteur et etiologie", 196-200.

⁶²⁷ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 74.

would eventually become the greatest of all the lords in Campania and a member of the local Lombard aristocracy. Being invested by Sergius IV of Naples as his vassal in the fortified town of Aversa – some 15 kilometres north of Naples – in 1030,⁶²⁸ soon after and he allied himself with Pandulf of Capua by marrying his niece, the princess of Amalfi in 1034.⁶²⁹ Four years later he switched his allegiance again, helping Gaimar V of Salerno against Pandulf, thus being installed at Aversa as an Imperial vassal in May 1038, after Conrad II's descent to Italy.⁶³⁰ It was in this turbulent period (1035) when the three sons of Tancred of Hauteville rode down to Italy.

The second stage of Norman infiltration to southern Italy (1038-61) – From the establishment at Melfi to the Sicilian invasion

The two decades between Cannae and the second German expedition to Italy in this period under Conrad II in spring 1038,⁶³¹ brought the increasing involvement of the Normans in the politics of the Lombard principalities of Campania. During this fragile period, however, the control of Constantinople over its subjects and on its neighbours was declining rapidly. This political instability in mainland Italy was taken advantage by the Kalbite Muslims of Sicily, who initiated an aggressive policy of raids during the first three decades of the eleventh century bringing chaos and destruction to the coastal cities of Apulia, Calabria and the

⁶²⁸ Amatus, I. 40; *Gesta*, I, 169-173, p. 108; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 77-78; Norwich, *The Normans in the South*, p. 43; on the early history of the Normans in Italy up to 1042, there is a useful study by: S. Tramontana, *I Normanni in Italia. Linee di ricerca sui primi insediamenti I Aspetti politici e militari*, Messina, 1970.

⁶²⁹ Kreutz, *Before the Normans*, pp. 87-93.

⁶³⁰ Amatus, II. 3; Malaterra, I. 6; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 63, pp. 288-93.

⁶³¹ For Conrad's expedition, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 76-78.

Tyrrhenian Sea, thus severely affecting the commercial sea-routes and the income of the Amalfitan and Salernitan traders.⁶³²

We have already studied the role of the Varangian Guard in the military expedition that was sent to Sicily in the summer of 1038.⁶³³ The army consisted of troops furnished from the mainland, mainly Greeks, Bulgarians, Vlachs and contingents from the Varangian Guard, while auxiliary Italian troops were also raised from the theme of Longobardia. Further, Constantinople called for its vassals in Italy to send reinforcements, with Gaimar being more than happy to furnish 300 Norman knights under William and Drogo Hauteville.⁶³⁴ For the military operations that took place throughout the campaign until its stalemate in 1040, we know nothing apart from the initial Byzantine success in taking Messina and the defeat of a Muslim army close to Syracuse that led to the capture of the city.⁶³⁵ But the Normans were not numerous enough as to have influenced the military operations, and the role played by the three hundred men under the command of William and Drogo would have been limited to small scale operations. However, the experience of marching for two years with a well disciplined army and participating in at least one major battle against an enemy they had not yet faced in his own ground (Syracuse), including one siege operation (Messina), must have been an extremely important experience for the Normans of Aversa and their leaders.

Following the Norman establishment at Aversa (1030), the event that had significant impact on the Norman establishment in Italy was their settlement in the strategic fortress-

⁶³² Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily*, pp. 34-35; Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, v. II, pp. 424-6; A. Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2009, pp. 79-80. I am grateful to Dr. Metcalfe for sending me the final draft of his forthcoming book on the Muslims of Medieval Italy.

⁶³³ For this expedition, see: Malaterra, 1. 7, 1. 8; *Gesta*, I, 196-221, pp. 108-110; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1038.

⁶³⁴ Skylitzes, II, pp. 520-3, 545; Zonaras, III, pp. 590-4; Malaterra, 1. 7, 1. 8; *Gesta*, I, 196-221, pp. 108-110; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1038.

⁶³⁵ Malaterra, 1. 7; Amatus, II, 8, 9; Skylitzes also mentions the capture of thirteen more cities: Skylitzes, II, p. 520; Zonaras, III, pp. 590-4; *Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, III, pp. 7-12.

town of Melfi in the Apulian-Campanian borders, in 1041. The city was “betrayed” to them by a Milanese officer of the Byzantine forces in Apulia called Arduin who, after commanding the Norman forces in Sicily he was placed as *topoteretes* (commander) of the town of Melfi. The latter would have hoped for a widespread rebellion against the Byzantine authorities when he called for the Normans from Aversa to send troops to the town and seize power,⁶³⁶ but he was soon to be disappointed. The “twelve Norman captains”⁶³⁷ and their followers⁶³⁸ established themselves in one of the most strategic towns in mainland Apulia, an event with major long-term consequences for the *status quo* in the region. In the short-term, however, the Byzantine Catepan Michael Doukeianos reacted sharply and confronted the united Lombard-Norman forces in two pitched battles. Both battles, however, at Olivento (17th March 1041) and Ofanto (4th May 1041) ended up with the Byzantine forces on a shameful retreat and the spreading of the rebellion in other parts of Apulia and the Capitanata. However, I should underline once more that the role of the Normans at this early stage of their expansion in Apulia was auxiliary and they were far from playing a leading role in the outcome of that insurrection. The Byzantines were swift to renew hostilities with the rebels and the third and final battle took place at Montepeloso on the 3rd September, ending up with the final defeat of the Byzantine arms.⁶³⁹

Even by the mid-1040s, the exact figure of the Normans in Aversa and Melfi is not known. As I will identify further down in this chapter, the numbers given for the Norman army from Melfi which had fought the Byzantines in 1041 were around five hundred, a quite reasonable number for two decades of almost continuous fighting and recruiting from parts of France. However, the fact that many territories in the north and west of Apulia surrendered to William Hauteville does not necessarily imply that this came as a result of their numerical

⁶³⁶ *Gesta*, I, 234-40, pp. 110-12; Malaterra, I, 9.

⁶³⁷ For the Christian meaning of the number twelve, see: Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 175-6.

⁶³⁸ None of the primary sources mentions the exact number of the Normans sent to Melfi. See: Gay, *L'Italie Meridionale*, p. 456.

⁶³⁹ Amatus, II, 23; *Gesta*, I, 322-3, p. 116.

strength or was part of a well-prepared plan. We do have to bear in mind that the Normans of Italy have not yet established a coherent political identity. They were still divided, with the two most powerful groups being those in Aversa and Melfi and other smaller bands operating independently in the Capitanata and northern Campania.

Throughout this period, from the establishment at Melfi (1041/2) to the battle at Civitate (1053), the Norman Counts of Melfi and Aversa systematically conquered large areas of Apulia from the Byzantines, who seemed quite powerless to respond. By 1047-8 almost all of the mainland area of northern and western Apulia belonged to the Normans, including Bovino, Lavello, Venosa, Montepeloso and Matera, while in the next two years they began their incursions further to the south and east, reaching as far as Lecce and Scribla.⁶⁴⁰ The biggest chance the Byzantines and the Papacy had to stop this systematic erosion of their territories by the Normans presented itself in 1053, when three years of political struggles between Pope Leo IX and the Lombard principalities, Germany and Byzantium,⁶⁴¹ ended up in one of the most crucial confrontations in medieval Italian history. The Normans were on their own against almost all their former friends⁶⁴² and enemies in Italy and their future in the peninsula depended on the outcome of this battle.

Leo IX's defeat at Civitate, apart from the obvious political consequences that it had upon all the political powers of southern Italy, it also opened the way to the Normans for further conquests in all directions, including Capua, Salerno (Gaimar had died in 1052), Capitanata, Apulia and Calabria. From this period onwards, the Normans were taking full advantage of their success and by the end of 1055 large areas of the "heel" of Otranto came under their strategic control, including Oria, Nardo, Lecce, Minervino, Otranto and Gallipoli, while

⁶⁴⁰ For a guide to these conquests, from Melfi (1042) to the end of the decade, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 98-114; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 97-118; Norwich, *The Normans in the South*, pp. 60-76.

⁶⁴¹ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 115-8; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 112-42; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 192-96.

⁶⁴² The most notable absence from this anti-Norman coalition was Salerno.

many others were paying tribute like Troia, Bari, Trani, Venosa and Acerenza.⁶⁴³ Further, Count Humphrey went as far as to besiege Benevento in 1054, an attempt that ended in a failure that revealed the Normans' inexperience in conducting effective siege-warfare. In the late 1050s, the most remarkable Norman advances were made in the province of Calabria by Robert Guiscard, leader of the Apulian Normans since 1057. By 1056, several of the most important strongholds in northern Calabria were paying tribute to him, like Bisignano, Martirano and Cosenza, while in late 1059 he was under the walls of Reggio, the capital of Byzantine Calabria, which submitted to him in the early summer of 1060.⁶⁴⁴

The strategy employed by the Normans in this crucial stage of their expansion in southern Italy, but also during the initial stages of the conquest of Sicily as well, had to do with the extraction of tribute from the majority of the cities and the establishment of outposts in order to have an effective control of the countryside. The Norman tactics appear to have been the seizure of a fortified place, or the building of a fortification in a strong natural position, using it to raid and spread terror to the surrounding areas and force the local population into submission, thereby swearing fealty, paying tribute and handing over hostages, but not necessarily surrendering the town or its castle (if there was any) into the hands of a garrison, like the Calabrian cities of Bisignano, Cosenza, Martirano and Gerace and, later, the Sicilian cities of Petralia and Rometta.⁶⁴⁵ This was quite sensible on the part of the Normans, because at this crucial stage they did not have either the manpower to put sufficient garrisons to each and every town nor the sufficient resources and, indeed, time to besiege each town into submission.

The Norman crossing to Sicily (1061)

⁶⁴³ *Gesta*, II. 293-296, p. 148.

⁶⁴⁴ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 123-30; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 143-55; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 184-92, 212-17.

⁶⁴⁵ Malaterra, 1. 17, 2. 13, 20.

If we look at what Malaterra writes about the motives behind the Norman invasion of Sicily in 1061: “noticing how narrow the sea was that separated it [Sicily] from Calabria, Roger, who was always avid for domination, was seized with the ambition of obtaining it. He figured that it would be of profit to him in two ways – that is, to his soul and to his body.”⁶⁴⁶ By reading this we understand that the decision to invade Sicily was planned by Roger just a few months before the actual invasion, which is surely not the case. In fact, already since the synod at Melfi in August 1059,⁶⁴⁷ Robert Guiscard had been invested by Pope Nicholas II as “future Duke of Sicily”, thus laying the foundation for the conquest of the island which would serve both parties. The Normans would profit from the conquest of an island as fertile and rich as Sicily, while the Catholic church would reap the fruits of glory for taking the island away from the “infidels” after almost two centuries and not allowing it to fall under the jurisdiction of Constantinople.⁶⁴⁸ The Norman invasion of Sicily, from the period between 1061 and the conquest of Palermo in 1072, consisted primarily of three major pitched battles between Norman and Muslim armies, either Kalbite or Zirid as we will see further down, two major sieges and one great amphibious operation conducted by a hybrid “Norman” fleet.

The island of Sicily is covered with mountains (25%) and hills (61%). Its geography is dominated by the mountain of Etna in the east coast (3,263 metres), while in the north there are three mountain groups – granite mountains covered with forest – that fall short of 2,000 metres and cover a zone from Milazzo to Termini and spread as far inland as Petralia and Nicosia. The coastlands of northern Sicily from Taormina to Trapani present an alternation of narrow alluvial plains and rocky spurs which often leave little space for communications. The interior of Sicily is dominated by impermeable rocks and rounded hills separated by open valleys, while the brutal climate with its long summer droughts and low rainfalls creates a

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., 2. 1.

⁶⁴⁷ For Robert Guiscard’s investiture at Melfi: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 186-94; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 237-44.

⁶⁴⁸ Sicily, Calabria and Illyria were transferred to the jurisdiction of Constantinople by Constantine V (741-75), due to the collapse of the Empire’s foreign policy in Italy in that period.

sharp contrast to the coastal zones. Finally, along the southern shore, low cliffs alternate with alluvial plains and between Mazara and Trapani a series of broad marine platforms can be identified.⁶⁴⁹

Turning our attention to the enemies that the Normans were to face in Sicily, by the beginning of the ninth century the Muslims had overwhelmed all of North Africa and were already launching significant and numerous raids in Calabria and Sicily itself. Their major chance to establish themselves permanently in the island came in the year 827 when, taking advantage of a local rebellion, the Muslims landed in the island in full strength and stormed Palermo in 830. Their progress was quite slow, a prelude to the Norman pace of conquest, and it took them five decades to subdue the island, which eventually fell to the Muslims mostly due to poor leadership and the Empire's struggle in the eastern frontiers against the Arabs.⁶⁵⁰ The Muslim dynasty of the Aghlavs that dominated Tripolitania and Tunisia had invaded Sicily since the second quarter of the ninth century, but the conquest had not been fully completed until in 902. The Aghlavs were ousted by the Fatimids, in 909, who directly ruled the island for almost four decades, until the year 947 when a governor was sent from Ifriqiya to crush a local rebellion at Palermo. His name was Ali al-Kalbi and his governorship was to lead to the establishment of the local Muslim dynasty of the Kalbites which was to rule the island for more than ninety years. While typically still vassals of the Fatimids and practically after 972 of the Zirid viceroys in Ifriqiya, the Kalbites enjoyed a significant degree of autonomy and self-sufficiency, while their dynastic rights on the island were recognised as hereditary in 970.

Despite the political stability and religious toleration of the second half of the tenth century, from the early eleventh century the political consensus began to break down and separatist forces emerged. Also in this period there was a great migration from North Africa,

⁶⁴⁹ For the Sicilian geography, see: Walker, *A Geography of Italy*, pp. 215-22.

⁶⁵⁰ Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily*, pp. 1-24.

due to civil-religious conflicts between Sunni and Shi'a factions,⁶⁵¹ and several Muslim naval raids took place, aiming at southern Italy and western Greece. When the last Kalbite emir, al-Hasan, was assassinated in 1052, the island became divided into three principalities. The south and centre was ruled by Ibn al-Hawas, who also commanded the key fortresses of Agrigento (in the west coast) and Castrogiovanni (in the centre), the west by Abd-Allah ibn Manqut and the east by Ibn al-Timnah, based in Catania. Ibn al-Timnah emerged in the Sicilian political scene in 1053 and in the following years he established himself in Syracuse. His conflict with al-Hawas and his gradual loss of power in the east of the island forced the Muslim emir to contact Roger, in February 1061 according to Malaterra. From that period and until his death in 1062, al-Timnah actively assisted the Normans in their invasion of the island by providing troops, guides, money and supplies in the vain hope that his allies, once defeating al-Hawas, would hand the island back to him.⁶⁵²

Reaching the southernmost tip of the Italian peninsula, after the conquest of the Byzantine capital of Calabria in 1059, the next step of the Norman expansion would certainly have taken Robert and Roger across the straits of Messina. Before the main invasion, which took place in May 1061, there were two other reconnaissance missions, one conducted by Roger who led an armed force of sixty knights across the straits and close to Messina in the summer of 1060, while the other took place two months before the main invasion and was led by Guiscard who targeted the surrounding areas of Messina.⁶⁵³ Concerning the main operation in May 1061, in order to avoid the Muslim ship-patrols which were sweeping the coasts, Roger landed in the Santa-Maria del Faro, just a few kilometres south, and his advance guard took

⁶⁵¹ In 1040 the Zirids of Ifriqiya declared their independence from the Fatimids of Cairo and converted to the Sunni faction of Islam, contrary to the overwhelmingly Shi'a Fatimids. The Kalbiters were mostly Shi'a Muslims. See: Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, pp. 92-3.

⁶⁵² Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily*, pp. 25-40; Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, pp. 70-87.

⁶⁵³ Malaterra, 2. 1, 4; Amatus, V. 9, 10.

the Muslim garrison of Messina by surprise and overran them.⁶⁵⁴ At this point, Malaterra notes a military tactic used by Roger to conquer the city, according to which Roger feigned retreat in order to draw the garrison out of the city, and then turned back and attacked them fiercely.⁶⁵⁵ Whether this was indeed a military tactic employed by Roger or it was just presented that way by the chronicler we will never know with certainty. However, it is important to note that this tactic of feigned flight was frequently used by the Normans in the second half of the eleventh century, with the most characteristic examples those of Hastings and Dyrrachium as I will examine in detail in a following chapter.

After securing Messina, Guiscard followed across with the main Norman force of about 1000 knights and 1000 infantry.⁶⁵⁶ The Norman army proceeded west through the northern coastal road, capturing Rometta with no great difficulty, but then failing to take Centuripe because of the city's strong fortifications, the lack of time and the danger of a relief army.⁶⁵⁷ Then they targeted the strategic stronghold of Castrogiovanni which was the head quarters of the local Emir Ibn al-Hawas and of great strategic importance,⁶⁵⁸ situated west of Mount Etna and Val Demone in central Sicily. The Normans, being far from their bases and in hostile territory where they had to rely on the local Christian orthodox population for supplies, along with the menacing approach of winter, could not afford to stay in Sicily for long. But the Muslims were nowhere to be found. In their usual tactics, Robert and Roger were active in seeking battle with their enemy, and they pillaged their way down to Castrogiovanni, killing many of the inhabitants, according to Malaterra, in order to provoke the Emir to face them.⁶⁵⁹

⁶⁵⁴ It would have been very interesting if we had any idea about the Muslim warning system using beacons. See: "On Strategy", 8. 1-20, p. 26; P. Pattenden, "The Byzantine Early Warning System", *Byzantion*, 53 (1983), 258-99.

⁶⁵⁵ Malaterra, 2. 1.

⁶⁵⁶ Amatus, V. 20.

⁶⁵⁷ Malaterra, 2. 15; Amatus, V. 21.

⁶⁵⁸ This is stressed by Malaterra: 3. 7.

⁶⁵⁹ Malaterra, 2. 16.

Thus took place the first of the major pitched battles between the Normans and the Muslims (summer 1061), close to the fortress of Castrogiovanni and on the banks of the river Dittaino. The heavily outnumbered army commanded by Robert Guiscard inflicted a heavy defeat on the Muslim army, a tremendously important victory for the Norman morale, if we consider the fact that the Norman conquest of Sicily was in its early stages. In the aftermath of the battle, apart from plundering the enemy camp, the Normans did not have any other significant gains and with the escape of a large number of Muslims (including Ibn al-Hawas) back into the fortress, any further stay in the area would have been pointless. Thus we have Roger's decision to retire back to Messina after a successful pillaging expedition to Agrigento.⁶⁶⁰

Despite the promising beginning, the conquest of Sicily proved a very lengthy process. So far, in their first year, the Normans had managed to take control over most of the areas of the north-east of the island, the Val Demone, mainly consisting of Greek-Orthodox Christians.⁶⁶¹ This anti-Muslim feeling of the population of that region had emerged as a significant factor already since the Byzantine expedition of the 1038-41, and it can be attributed to the aggressive Kalbite policy of extending the Muslim colonies in the south and east of the island.⁶⁶² But once the Muslims had recovered from their initial shock, they resisted stoutly for many more years. However, the main reason for the difficulty in conquering the island certainly was the rarity of occasions when the Normans could deploy sufficient forces to Sicily, with Roger having just a few hundred knights to maintain his dominions and launch plundering expeditions when necessary. Throughout the year 1062, no major conflicts

⁶⁶⁰ Malaterra, 2. 17; a similar plundering expedition was conducted during the following winter by Roger and 250 knights in Agrigento, see: *Ibid.*, 2. 18.

⁶⁶¹ For the Greek-Orthodox element in Sicily and, more specifically, in the Val Demone: V. von Falkenhausen, "The Greek Presence in Norman Sicily: the Contribution of Archival Material in Greek", *The Society of Norman Italy*, 253-88.

⁶⁶² Ahmad, *A History of Islamic Sicily*, p. 37; Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, pp. 81-82; idem, "The Muslims of Sicily under Christian Rule", 289-95.

between the Normans and the Muslims occurred, mostly because of Roger's strife with his brother.⁶⁶³

To understand why Robert Guiscard could ill-afford to send many troops to his brother in Sicily, apart from their strife already mentioned in 1062, was the fact that Apulia was a far more important operational theatre than Sicily. And to follow Guiscard's operations in the region, he had to deal with the conquests of Brindisi (recaptured by the Byzantines soon after) and Oria in 1062, along with a serious rebellion at Cosenza, in Calabria, in 1064-65 which took several months to suppress.⁶⁶⁴ Robert's attention was again turned to Apulia only after 1065, capturing Vieste and Otranto by the end of 1066. Soon afterwards, however, he was about to face the most dangerous rebellion against his power in Apulia, headed by Amicus, Joscelin of Molfetta, Roger Tutebove and two of his own nephews, Geoffrey of Conversano and Abelard.⁶⁶⁵ The way in which the operational theatres of Apulia and Sicily are connected is clear, thus in order to properly examine the Norman invasion of Sicily we should keep a close eye to the political and military developments across the straits of Messina.

After the settlement of the strife between Robert and his brother Roger in spring 1063, we can see a slight change of tactics used by the latter to conduct his warfare in Sicily. In order to diminish his disadvantage of having a very small number of knights at his disposal - stipendiary troops from his own household in Calabria, along with soldiers serving primarily for booty as we have already examined in detail - he used the mobility and speed of the horses to lay ambushes to the Muslims, with the most characteristic example that of the Norman victory at Cerami, in the early summer of 1063. However, important as it was, the

⁶⁶³ Malaterra, 2. 23; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 155; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 201-3.

⁶⁶⁴ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 132.

⁶⁶⁵ Although Chalandon has noted that the rebellion began in 1064, recent studies by Loud have shown that this Apulian rebellion only occupied the period from the autumn of 1067 to early spring of 1068. See: Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 178-85; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 133-34.

victory at Cerami did not bring the Normans closer to conquering the island but merely confirmed their holding of the north-eastern part. Roger simply maintained his army in a hand-to-mouth basis, relying on plundering raids, mostly in the south and south-west of the island, while help from Apulia was far from imminent.

Following the events at Cerami, we have very little information concerning what was taking place in Sicily during the next four years, which suggests either that Roger had only a few troops at his disposal, or because the Muslims were putting vigorous resistance to the Norman expansion. Nonetheless, we are told that Roger maintained pressure on his enemies and carried on with his advance, albeit gradual, along the north coast towards the capital.⁶⁶⁶ Petralia, which had been abandoned in 1062, was reoccupied and made Roger's main base in Sicily,⁶⁶⁷ with its fortifications being improved in 1066.⁶⁶⁸ By 1068, the raids conducted by Roger were affecting the entire north coast, reaching close to Palermo itself and, in that year, he was able to inflict a bloody defeat on the Muslims at Misilmeri, only 12 kilometres south-east of the capital.

The conquests of Bari (1071) and Palermo (1072)

By the end of August 1068, Robert Guiscard was ready to begin the most ambitious military operation he had yet undertaken – the siege of Bari. And there is no doubt about the significance of this military operation. Even though the Byzantines had been dislodged from their bases elsewhere in Italy, Bari was still the largest and wealthiest city, the most important port of southern Adriatic and the seat of the Catepan of the Byzantine province, or what was

⁶⁶⁶ Malaterra, 2. 38.

⁶⁶⁷ Roger's attention to the west and north is marked by his moving of his main base from Troina to Petralia.

⁶⁶⁸ Malaterra, 2. 38.

left, of Longobardia.⁶⁶⁹ By the year 1068, the Normans had enjoyed a significant number of victories against all of their enemies in both Italy and Sicily, with their record being quite admirable indeed. But their major weakness at this stage was their lack of experience in conducting siege and naval warfare.

During the siege of the city, Guiscard did his best to exploit the internal divisions among the inhabitants of Bari. From the side of the Byzantine government, two attempts were made to relieve the city with shipments of supplies and money. One took place in 1069, when Bariot officials returned from Constantinople with a supply fleet, but as Amatus tells us “this small amount of money was quickly consumed.”⁶⁷⁰ The second, early in 1071, was led by Joscelin of Molfetta, a Norman rebel who had fled to Constantinople after the suppression of the Norman rebellion in 1068.⁶⁷¹ In between the two attempts, Guiscard made an expedition with his fleet further south, at Brindisi, in 1070. Probably he wished to create a diversion, which however ended in a defeat of his fleet by the Byzantine naval officer and commander of a naval squadron, Leo Mavrikas, while his land forces were ambushed by the governor of Brindisi.⁶⁷²

Bari’s surrender on 16th April 1071 was a tremendous success for the Norman duke, who now possessed the last Byzantine stronghold not only in Apulia but in the entire Italian Peninsula. But not for the first time, luck did indeed favour him. We do not know with certainty whether Robert was aware of the geo-political events that were taking place in Asia Minor, but his timing in launching this operation could not have been better. Since his climb to the throne of Constantinople, in 1068, Romanus IV Diogenes was preoccupied with the fight against the Seljuc Turks in Asia Minor, a multitude of provinces far more important to the Empire than Longobardia. Thus Romanus, an old and experienced Byzantine general,

⁶⁶⁹ For more on Bari, see: P. Skinner, “Room for tension: urban life in Apulia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries”, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 65 (1998), 159-77.

⁶⁷⁰ Amatus, V. 27.

⁶⁷¹ Amatus, V. 4.

⁶⁷² Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1071; Skylitzes, II, pp. 722-23; Cecaumenos, pp. 66-7.

Brindisi fell to the Normans shortly before Bari’s capitulation.

chose the eastern theatre as his main priority and, consequently, he could not spare any reinforcements for the besieged people of Bari. Guiscard might have been informed about these events by the Franks who were serving in the Imperial Army, but we cannot be entirely sure. Thus, the speed in which the Normans had cleared Apulia and Calabria off the Byzantine presence there can be largely attributed to the lack of substantial reinforcements sent by the central government.

The duke has seen the importance that the conquest of Palermo would have to his dominance over the entire island, already since 1064, but his expedition then failed due to the lack of resources, sufficient manpower and naval support. In Bari he had managed to overturn these inefficiencies, with the naval blockade conducted by his navy being the key move that won him the city. Palermo was a large coastal city-port, like Bari, and Guiscard could do nothing else but to apply, once more, the same strategy. However, the siege was preceded by a diversion expedition to southern Sicily, conducted by Roger, to draw the attention of the Zirids of Tunisia to Malta rather than Palermo. This is clearly suggested by Malaterra, who also notes the capture of Catania as a “trophy” of this campaign.⁶⁷³ Sicily was very important for the Zirids, mostly for importing large quantities of wheat and grain, and although they had officially withdrawn from Sicily a few years earlier, they still had forces in the island, as William of Apulia mentions the presence of Muslim ships that later engaged the Normans;⁶⁷⁴ so the diversion attack was wisely ordered by Robert.

The Normans had achieved in conquering half of the island by 1071, including the capital and some of the most important cities, only by displaying considerable flexibility in arranging terms of surrender when dealing with a siege of a powerful stronghold, a strategy that they had already used with relative success in Calabria and Sicily for more than a decade. Both Robert Guiscard and Roger allowed the local population to surrender their city without inflicting any damage to them or their properties and to swear allegiance to him, while in

⁶⁷³ Malaterra, 2. 45; Amatus, VI. 14; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. 206.

⁶⁷⁴ *Gesta*, III, 225-234, p. 176.

many cases not even a Norman garrison was installed,⁶⁷⁵ mostly due to lack of a sufficient number of troops. Further, during the period of the 1060s until the siege of Palermo, Guiscard was active in taking advantage of the divisions among his enemies. In Bari, he was well aware of the fact that a storming operation against the city walls would have been a failure, thus he favoured the pro-Norman party of the city which was struggling to convince the Bariots to surrender. In Sicily, Robert chose the right timing in leading his army to the island, which in the last couple of decades was politically divided between three emirs, taking the part of Ibn al-Timnah who controlled the Christian north-eastern part and had earlier asked for their military assistance.

After 1072 and the gradual establishment of the Norman power in Sicily, we have to examine, albeit briefly, Count Roger's demands for military service from Muslim populations.⁶⁷⁶ From what information we get from our primary sources – mainly Malaterra and Amatus, we understand that the great need of Robert Guiscard and Roger for locally raised troops would have developed into some sort of an agreement with the local Muslim communities for a quota of militias, most likely non-fixed, in addition to the expected tribute. If we look first at the demand for military service from the people of Iato, in the Muslim Val di Mazara, in 1079: “the people of Iato came to despise the yoke of our people and renounced their previous agreement to provide service and tribute.”⁶⁷⁷ Amatus also writes that Guiscard had used Muslim sailors in his blockade of Salerno in 1076,⁶⁷⁸ while for the 1084 Illyrian expedition Malaterra mentions ships from “all over Apulia, Calabria and Sicily.”⁶⁷⁹ Also, Roger used Muslim elements at Cosenza (1091) and Castrovillari (1094).⁶⁸⁰ The most

⁶⁷⁵ Garrisons were installed in Messina, Rometta, Catania, Troina, Petralia and Nicosia, while Roger attempted to install one also at Gerace, see: Malaterra, 2. 5, 6, 20, 28, 38, 45.

⁶⁷⁶ For more on this issue, see: Metcalfe, *The Muslims of Medieval Italy*, p. 95; Rogers, *Latin Siege Warfare*, pp. 100-102; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 170.

⁶⁷⁷ Malaterra, 3. 20.

⁶⁷⁸ Amatus, VIII. 14.

⁶⁷⁹ Malaterra, 3. 40.

⁶⁸⁰ Malaterra, 4. 17, 22.

significant deployment of Muslim troops, however, came during the siege of Capua by Roger and Richard II of Capua in 1098, where Roger had “many thousands” of Muslim troops in his service that constituted the largest part of his army.⁶⁸¹

Major siege operations conducted by the Normans in Italy and Sicily (1050s-70s)

The Normans took the initiative in Italy right after their victory at Civitate, with the most remarkable advances taking place in Calabria, mostly between the years 1056-9, a period when all the Byzantine strongholds in the peninsula surrendered to Guiscard. The siege of the city of Reggio, which began in the late 1059, marked an important chapter in Norman military expertise, not only because it was the first major city that the Normans had to fight themselves in, but also because it was the first recorded case where the Normans actually used siege engines of such a size and scale.⁶⁸² The garrison of Reggio was eventually forced to surrender in the early summer of 1060, and as Malaterra tells us: “when they [Byzantines] saw the siege machines being pulled up towards it [fortress], they lost confidence in their own strength and came to terms.”⁶⁸³

In Apulia during the same period, Troia fell to Robert not before a land blockade forced the defenders to surrender due to hunger, in 1060, while in early 1068, during Robert’s siege of his nephew Geoffrey’s stronghold at Montepeloso, after the latter’s rebellion against his uncle a few months earlier, the city capitulated only after the Normans bribed the local castellan.⁶⁸⁴ At Messina, the only city where the Normans had to force themselves into, luck favoured them because most of the garrison had already been put out of action in a previous sortie and the remaining defenders were caught by surprise. But conducting an effective land

⁶⁸¹ Eadmer, *The Life of St-Anselm*, ed. R.W. Southern, Oxford, 1962, pp. 106-13; Malaterra, 4. 26.

⁶⁸² Some siege engines were used in 1041, during the battle of Montepeloso. But Malaterra is too vague in his terminology, see: Malaterra, 1. 10.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, 1. 34.

⁶⁸⁴ *Gesta*, II, 459-73, pp. 156-8.

and naval blockade in a large and well-fortified city such as Bari surely presented a huge task for Guiscard's newly-established navy and relatively inexperienced army.

The siege of Bari began in August/September 1068 and the necessity of a wide-range mobilisation of all the Italian vassals of Robert was clear. This probably must have triggered the rebellion in Apulia and Calabria a year earlier, when Guiscard demanded military service from his vassals, a rebellion that was provoked by the refusal of certain powerful vassals to offer military service for lands they had conquered on their own – a rebellion that was fuelled by Byzantine money.⁶⁸⁵ Even though the Normans must have brought all the soldiers they could spare, along with Calabrians to man their ships, none of the chroniclers give an estimate of the numbers of either of the opposing armies.⁶⁸⁶ The Byzantines were quick to see that they were impregnable behind their high walls, and so they were reluctant to offer the Normans what they really wanted – a pitched battle. Thus, Guiscard immediately ordered his fleet to block the entrance of the city's port and bring the siege engines "of different types" in front of the city, ready to make full use of them.⁶⁸⁷ The siege continued for more than two and a half years, a clear sign of Guiscard's decisiveness and (financial) ability to keep large numbers of troops in the field for long periods, during which reinforcements also arrived from Sicily under Roger.⁶⁸⁸ The determination of the Bariots, however, seemed strong.

Something quite striking that needs to be mentioned at this point is the absence of the local units of the Byzantine navy from the area. None of the chroniclers mention the presence of any Byzantine ships in the initial stages of the siege and Robert Guiscard was left, apparently, unopposed to impose his naval blockade on the city. We cannot be sure about what might have happened to the Italian units of the Byzantine provincial fleet, but we presume that either they would have been evacuated to Dyrrachium, a much safer base, or

⁶⁸⁵ Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 178-85; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, p. 298; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 133-34.

⁶⁸⁶ *Gesta*, II, 485-6, p. 158; Waley, "Combined Operations", 121.

⁶⁸⁷ *Gesta*, II, 517-19, 522-27, p. 160; Amatus talks about siege-castles and numerous catapults: Amatus, V. 27.

⁶⁸⁸ Malaterra, 2. 43.

they would have been patrolling the southern Adriatic coasts of Apulia, from Bari to Otranto. The last seems more likely, since we saw a naval squadron of unknown strength defeating Robert Guiscard's units off Brindisi in 1070 under Leo Mavrikas, a senior naval officer who will be seen again off the Dyrrachian coasts in 1081.

Once Bari had capitulated on the 16th April 1071, a major expedition to Sicily was ordered since the campaigning period had just begun. After staying a few days at Bari, Robert ordered his army to move to Reggio,⁶⁸⁹ while his brother was already on his way to Sicily for his task in diverting the Muslims' attention elsewhere. We do not have any specific numbers by the chroniclers, neither for the Muslim garrison of Palermo nor for the Normans, but we know that Guiscard ordered all of his troops that had taken part at the Bari campaign to follow him to Reggio. Guiscard's fleet is estimated by Amatus to at least 50, while Lupus Protospatharius takes the number up to 58.⁶⁹⁰ This was an important increase on the Norman's fleet capacity that probably came from all the captured Bariot ships, in comparison to the naval operation at Messina only twelve years earlier when Robert had only thirteen transport ships. This significant increase in the number of ships makes us think that there might have been a plan of overcoming Bari first in order to obtain more ships for the siege of Palermo. The mariners that manned the Norman ships were Calabrians, Bariots and, according to William of Apulia, captive Greeks, while the marines were definitely Normans.⁶⁹¹ Finally, we have to mention a great strategic movement by Robert who, in order to secure his back from any relief army, he installed the son of Serlo at the region of Cerami and Castrogiovanni to harass the enemy.⁶⁹²

The siege of Palermo lasted for five months and, although the chroniclers' accounts are contradictory, we are able to reconstruct the basic chain of events. It is clear that the city was

⁶⁸⁹ *Gesta*, III, 166, p. 172.

⁶⁹⁰ 10 "gatti" and 40 "other ships", probably galleys as Bennett suggests, see: M. Bennett, "Norman Naval Activity in the Mediterranean, 1060-1108", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 15 (1992), 13; Amatus, VI. 14; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1071.

⁶⁹¹ *Gesta*, III, 235-6, p. 176-7.

⁶⁹² Malaterra, 2. 46.

blockaded by land and sea and that there were sorties and sharp engagements between Norman and Palermitan detachments under the city's walls.⁶⁹³ As time went on, hunger and disease quickly became a major problem for the besieged, a clear sign that the city was not adequately prepared for a siege and maybe Roger's diversionary expedition to Catania had brought results.⁶⁹⁴ Regarding naval engagements, William of Apulia talks about a battle between the Norman and a mixed Kalbite-Zirid fleet of unknown size outside the port of Palermo, when the Normans forced their enemies to retreat back into the port.⁶⁹⁵ Finally, Guiscard entered the city by applying a simple trick of diverting the enemy in one place of the city, while an elite unit climbed the walls elsewhere.⁶⁹⁶ The last line of defence, in the original "old-city" of al-Kazar, lasted only for a few days falling on 10th January 1072, and the defenders agreed to surrender their city to Guiscard, on condition that he spared their lives and allowed them to continue to practice their religion unimpeded.⁶⁹⁷

In the 1070s, two sieges conducted by the Normans took place in Italy, one at Salerno in 1076 and the other at Naples one year later. The key point in both these cases is that Richard of Capua joined forces with Robert Guiscard against papal territories in Campania. At Salerno, the Norman army consisted of "three different peoples, Latins, Greeks and Saracens, and he [Guiscard] ordered many ships to come to Salerno to guard the harbour", although no specific number is given, while all the necessary fortifications were built around the city to block its approaches.⁶⁹⁸ In this case, as in many others, the Normans' main weapon was famine, which did not take long to show its first serious effects on the inhabitants. However, the city did not choose to surrender but was rather betrayed to Robert on the 13th December

⁶⁹³ Amatus, VI, 16; Malaterra, 2. 45; *Gesta*, III, 207, 211-224, pp. 174-6.

⁶⁹⁴ Amatus, VI. 17.

⁶⁹⁵ *Gesta*, III, 225-54, pp. 176-178.

⁶⁹⁶ We will see in a following chapter that this tactic was used by the crusaders to capture Jerusalem in 1099.

⁶⁹⁷ *Gesta*, III, 324, p. 182.

⁶⁹⁸ Amatus, VIII. 14.

1076, almost eight months after the beginning of the siege.⁶⁹⁹ Even by the mid-1070s, the Norman besieging techniques were still famine and treason from within instead of costly siege operations that could not guarantee a desirable outcome.

After the taking of Salerno, Richard of Capua ordered his forces to assemble and march against Naples in the early spring 1077, while asking Robert's help for a naval blockade. According to Amatus, Guiscard sent help in a form of a naval squadron of unknown numerical strength from Amalfi – which had surrendered to Guiscard in 1073 – and Calabria, while the necessary fortifications to blockade the city by land were also erected.⁷⁰⁰ We are informed that there were frequent attacks on the city by the Normans, either by land or sea, that were repulsed successfully, and numerous attempts by the defenders to counterattack and face the Normans outside the city walls.⁷⁰¹ But even in this case, the Normans were waiting for famine to force the defenders to consider surrendering their city. However, the siege was prolonged for many more months, when finally Richard's death in April 1078 forced the Normans of Capua to abandon the operation.⁷⁰²

Major naval operations conducted by the Normans in Italy and Sicily (1060s-70s)

One of the greatest challenges that the Normans had to face since their arrival in Italy, almost four decades ago was the transportation of a large armed force by sea. Since that time, even though they were descendants of the Scandinavians, it is quite unlikely that they had ever set foot on a war-ship before,⁷⁰³ let alone organise a massive amphibious operation in a

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., VIII, 24; *Gesta*, III, 424-455, pp. 186-88; Romuald of Salerno, s.a. 1076; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1077; *Chronicon Casin.*, III, 45, pp. 422-3.

⁷⁰⁰ Amatus, VIII. 25.

⁷⁰¹ Amatus even talks about 200 marines being caught by the people of Naples while sleeping, see: Ibid., VIII. 25.

⁷⁰² Amatus, VIII. 32; *Chronic. Casin.*, III, 45, p. 423.

⁷⁰³ However, William and Drogo had taken part in the Byzantine expedition in Sicily in 1038, when they were transported from the mainland by transport ships of the Byzantine fleet.

hostile territory. As William of Apulia notes just before writing about the siege of Bari: “The Norman race had up to this point known nothing of naval warfare. He [Robert Guiscard] greatly rejoiced at the novelty of this naval victory, hoping that he and the Normans might in the future engage in battle at sea with more hope of success.”⁷⁰⁴ For the period between the years 1060-76 the possibility of the Normans having built their own ships can be clearly discounted, not only because there is no indication by the chroniclers but also because there are no halts in their operations which can be explained by their stopping to build ships. The significance, therefore, of Guiscard’s and Roger’s landing in the coasts near Messina in May 1061 is great for the evolution of military thinking, not only for Italy but for Normandy and England as well.⁷⁰⁵

The Normans, apart from lacking experience in conducting naval operations, did not have the knowledge or skills to build a fleet of warships and especially horse-transport ships.⁷⁰⁶ Consequently all they could do was to use the ships of their conquered subjects, especially because the Greeks and the Apulians were very experienced sailors and the Byzantine fleet was accustomed to carrying cavalry units, with the most recent examples the 1025 and 1038 Sicilian campaigns. By conquering Cariati, Rossano, Gerace and Otranto by 1066, meaning some of the most important Byzantine ports in southern Italy after Bari, they had the chance to use the Greek ships and crew for their own military purposes. Although information about

⁷⁰⁴ *Gesta*, III. 132-38, p. 170.

⁷⁰⁵ D.P. Waley argues that the knowledge for conducting massive amphibious operations was transported to Normandy by the Normans who had taken part in the crossing of the Messina straits in 1061. Which, in turn, had been obtained by Normans who participated in the Byzantine campaign of 1038-41 against the Muslims in Sicily: D.P. Waley, “Combined Operations in Sicily, A.D. 1060-78”, *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 22 (1954), 121-22; Bernard Bachrach supports this argument: B.S. Bachrach, “Some Observations on the Military Administration of the Norman Conquest”, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 8 (1985), 7; idem, “On the Origins of William the Conqueror’s Horse Transports”, *Technology and Culture*, 26 (1985), 505-31.

⁷⁰⁶ The possibility of having shipwrights with them cannot be supported by the chronicler material.

the types of vessels employed by the Normans in their amphibious operation are scarce, with the chroniclers frequently employing the vague term *naves*,⁷⁰⁷ in general terms the ships captured in the aforementioned ports must have been mostly long, open galleys, heavy round-hull merchant and small fishing ships which could have been adapted for naval use and Venetian and Amalfitan ships of various types, all mentioned with the terms *chelandion* (χελάνδιον), *pamfyllos* (πάμφυλος), *sandalion* (σανδάλιον), *catina* (κατίνα), *tarida* – Arabic *tarrada*, the horse-transport ship of the Muslims in the tenth century that had a square stern with two stem-posts, which enabled there to be a ramp that could be lowered to unload the horses – and *sagena*.⁷⁰⁸

There is a debate among historians concerning the use of the Calabrian and Apulian ships and their crews. Although the primary sources are vague in their terminology and avoid mentioning precisely if the tribute being paid by certain coastal cities, either Italian or Sicilian, was accompanied with any supplementary military service, both D.P. Waley and John Pryor agree that the ships and crews were hired by the Normans to be used in Sicily and, later on, in Bari and Palermo.⁷⁰⁹ C.D. Stanton on the other hand argues that the Normans demanded a quota from each major port as part of a required tribute. This undoubtedly resembles the naval equivalent of the feudal service owed by the Cinque Ports in England, already established since the years of Edward the Confessor (1042-66), along with the

⁷⁰⁷ Malaterra mostly uses *naves*. When he becomes more specific, which is very rare, he uses terms like *germundi*, *galea*, *catti*, *golafri* and *dromundi* (from the Byzantine *dromon*):

Malaterra, 2. 8; Amatus is using the terms *catti*, *naves* and *galea*: Amatus, V. 13-15.

⁷⁰⁸ Bennett, “Norman Naval Activity”, 41-58; Pryor, *Geography, technology and war*, pp. 25-39, 60-63; Waley, “Combined Operations in Sicily”, 119-21; C.M. Gillmor, “Naval logistics of the cross-Channel operation, 1066”, *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 7 (1984), 105-31; B.M. Kreutz, “Ships, Shipping, and the Implications of Change in the Early Mediterranean”, *Viator*, 7 (1976), 99-100; C.D. Stanton, “Naval Power in the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy and Sicily”, *Haskins Society Journal*, 19 (2008), 130-1. Although I believe that Stanton is wrong to suggest that the main type of warship that could have been found in Longobardia in the eleventh century was the *dromon*. I have explained this in a previous chapter.

⁷⁰⁹ Waley, “Combined Operations”, 121; Pryor, “Transportation of horses by sea”, 12-13.

scipfyrd which simply was the parallel of fyrd-men who served as sailors.⁷¹⁰ Although the issue of fifteen days service, too short indeed for an ambitious campaign, might have been tackled by payment, it would not be wise to dismiss the influence of the Anglo-Saxon naval organization upon the “Italian” Normans.

In 1061, Guiscard and Roger took, according to Amatus, 270 knights in 13 ships across the straits in the first wave and then 166 knights in the second wave,⁷¹¹ in an attempt to capture Messina and secure the transportation of the rest of the army from the opposite Calabrian coast. However, this number of men transported across the straits in the first wave, twenty men with their horses in each ship, meant a ratio of 1:1 for men and horses being transported. This would suggest that Guiscard was able to pack his ships with as many horses as possible in this short distance crossing, with the distance being a significant factor indeed if we compare Messina with Roger’s crossing to Malta thirty years later when he carried just fourteen horses in his flagship.⁷¹² The number of men and horses also confirms the fact that the ships which were used were not designed primarily for transportation, like the Byzantine ships which had a loading capacity of about 105-110 men and around 12-20 horses.⁷¹³

If we compare the two theatres of operation, Sicily and England, at first glance there seems to be no immediate connection between them. However, there are very strong

⁷¹⁰ Stanton, “Naval Power”, 132-4; compare with what E. Van Houts writes about the obligation of William II’s magnates to provide ships for the English invasion: Van Houts, “The Ship List of William the Conqueror”, 159-83. I did not have the chance to go through: S.M. Foster, *Some Aspects of Maritime Activity and the Use of Sea Power in Relation to the Crusading States*, D.Phil. thesis, Oxford 1978. For the service owed by the Cinque Ports, see: Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 268-72; N.A.M. Rodger, *The Safeguard of the Sea*, vol. I (660-1649), Harper Collins, London, 1997, pp. 23-27; Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions*, pp. 103-26; Strickland, “Military Technology and Culture”, 373-79.

⁷¹¹ Amatus, V. 15; 300 and 150 knights respectively, according to Malaterra, see: Malaterra, 2. 10.

⁷¹² Pryor, “Transportation of horses by sea”, 13.

⁷¹³ Pryor, Jeffreys, *The Age of the Δρόμων*, pp. 123-34, 254-55, 307, 325-30; Waley, “Combined Operations”, 121.

indications that the knowledge and experience gained in Sicily in 1061 significantly helped William the Conqueror in his invasion five years later.⁷¹⁴ Even if we dismiss the enigmatic line in the *Carmen de Hastingae Proelio*,⁷¹⁵ charter evidence does confirm the fact that relations between members of families in Normandy and Italy were maintained,⁷¹⁶ and it is highly likely that they were the only members of William's army which the latter could have asked for advice on how to transport his large, for the standards of the time, army across the English Channel. D.P. Waley notes that the technical problems were the same in the north and south,⁷¹⁷ and there have been many instances of Mediterranean influence on shipping in the north, like the master of the English king's ship in the early twelfth century who was an Italian.⁷¹⁸ However, if we dismiss the argument of the many existing similarities of the types of warships in the Mediterranean and the North Sea, an argument that cannot be supported by what evidence we have for the following centuries, meaning more specifically the absence of any "Mediterranean" galleys from northern waters.⁷¹⁹ It seems likely that the real contribution of the Normans lies not in the ship-building procedure but rather in the modification of the existing ships from Flanders or Normandy, either warships similar to their Viking predecessors or merchant vessels, to enable them to transport William's army across

⁷¹⁴ I have to include the view of Matthew Bennett who disagrees with the link between the Mediterranean and the Channel: M. Bennett, "Amphibious Operations from the Norman Conquest to the Crusades of St. Louis, c. 1050-c. 1250", *Amphibious Warfare 1000-1700*, ed. D.J.B. Trim and M.C. Fissel, Brill, Leiden, 2006, 52-3. Bennett based his argument in a series of studies edited in: *The Earliest Ships: the evolution of boats into ships*, ed. R. Gardiner, London, 1996, chapters 5, 7, 8.

⁷¹⁵ *The Carmen de Hastingae Proelio of Guy, Bishop of Amiens*, ed. and tr. by F. Barlow, Clarendon, Oxford, 1999, 259-60, p. 16.

⁷¹⁶ Loud, "How Norman was the Norman Conquest of Southern Italy?", 13-34; idem, "The Kingdom of Sicily and the Kingdom of England, 1066-1266", *History*, 88 (October 2003), 540-67; Menager, "Pesanteur et etologie", 189-214; "Inventaires des Familles", 260-390.

⁷¹⁷ Although Gillmor argues that the landing ground in Sussex required ships with shorter hulls, see: "Naval logistics", 105-31.

⁷¹⁸ Haskins, *Norman Institutions*, pp. 121-2.

⁷¹⁹ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, p. 265.

the Channel. Given that the “Italian” Normans had not witnessed the construction of any Byzantine or Italian vessel, or at least their presence in any shipyard in Italy is not recorded, they are unlikely to have put into practice a ship-building knowledge that they had not acquired. These Normans, however, have seen firsthand how a merchant vessel could be modified to transport horses, and this experience they could transfer to their counterparts in northern France. This argument can be further enhanced by the fact that, although William of Poitiers tells us that ships were ordered to be constructed, it is highly unlikely that a large number of them would have been built in the few months before the landing at Sussex.

Major pitched battles fought by the Normans in Italy and Sicily (1040s-70s)

The three battles fought in the year 1041 between the Byzantines and the united Lombard-Norman rebel forces were of great importance for the future of the Norman establishment at Melfi and in Italy in general. For the first pitched battle on the banks of the river Olivento on 17th March 1041, the rebel force consisted of 500 infantrymen and 700 cavalrymen,⁷²⁰ placing the Normans in the centre of the formation as the most elite and well-equipped unit, and keeping the infantry on the sides to protect the flanks.⁷²¹ William does not tell us of the composition of the Byzantine army nor can we believe his comments that they were numerous enough,⁷²² but he does let us know of their battle tactic of not letting their entire army engage the enemy in one attack-wave. Instead they preferred sending one battalion at a time in repeated attacks until the enemy’s front had been broken.⁷²³ The Byzantine units that engaged the rebel forces at Olivento probably consisted of local militias with limited or no military experience and poor equipment and probably did not manage to resist the impetus of

⁷²⁰ William also says that few of the Normans had hauberks: “Obtectos clipeis paucos lorita tuetur”, *Gesta*, I, 259, p. 112; Amatus, II. 21.

⁷²¹ *Gesta*, I. 260-62, p. 112.

⁷²² *Gesta*, I. 255-6, p. 112; Amatus, I. 21; Malaterra, 1. 10.

⁷²³ That tactic is also attested by: Amatus, II. 21.

a Norman cavalry charge. And this is because it is unlikely that an elite and numerous enough army could have been deployed from Sicily, where the army was still based since Maniaces' campaign, to Apulia in such a short notice (maybe even less than two weeks). Also, Skylitzes does not mention the presence of elite troops at Olivento,⁷²⁴ but for the next battle at Ofanto a few weeks later he specifically talks about troops from the Greek mainland and Varangians.

The second battle took place at the river Ofanto further south, on the 4th May. After having received all the necessary reinforcements from Sicily,⁷²⁵ the Byzantines faced the rebels in a battle for which we know next to nothing apart from the Byzantine army's retreat after repeated attempts to break the enemy's front, suffering heavy casualties.⁷²⁶ The numerical strength of the opposing armies is not known, but the rebel army is unlikely to have suffered many casualties at Olivento, and if they had it must not have been difficult to replace them with new recruits joining their army after their previous victory. For the third and final battle of the year, fought at Montepeloso on the 3rd September, although Amatus tells us that the new Catepan Boioannes had brought with him Varangians from the capital,⁷²⁷ and William talks about reinforcements called from Sicily,⁷²⁸ it is more likely that Boioannes had to rely on the forces that his predecessor had gathered,⁷²⁹ along with newly recruited Apulian troops as well. For the rebel force, Amatus' comments on their recruiting tactics imply that were hard-pressed and low on numbers, probably a few hundred strong.⁷³⁰ The initiative on the battlefield belonged to the rebels who, being aware of the position of the enemy camp sent a small force in an attempt to steal horses – an indication that they still did not possess enough

⁷²⁴ Skylitzes, II, p. 546.

⁷²⁵ Skylitzes, II, p. 546; *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1041; Amatus, II. 22.

⁷²⁶ Amatus, II. 23; *Gesta*, I, 297-308, p. 114; Malaterra, 1.10, although Malaterra confuses Ofanto with Montepeloso; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 66, pp. 298-301.

⁷²⁷ Amatus, II. 24; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 66, pp. 298-301.

⁷²⁸ *Gesta*, I, 328-30, p. 116.

⁷²⁹ Skylitzes is adamant that no reinforcements were sent with Boioannes from the mainland, see: Skylitzes, II, p. 546.

⁷³⁰ Amatus, II. 25.

mounts in the region – from them and force them to come out of the camp and fight them in a pitched battle. This they did and they also succeeded in inflicting a third and final defeat on the Byzantines.⁷³¹

By the year 1040, the Normans had already established a permanent base at Aversa, but it was only in 1041 when they allied themselves with Lombard rebels and seriously challenged the Byzantine authority in a key fortress in Apulian territory. As in the previous decades, the numbers of Norman cavalry units engaged in the Lombard rebellion is not mentioned, with a figure between 500-1000 cavalry being the most likely. The Norman cavalry would have constituted the most elite unit of the rebel army and so it would have been deployed in the centre of the formation in order to take full advantage of its heavy cavalry charge and, hopefully, overrun the Byzantine units. It would have been extremely valuable if we had any information about the impact of the Norman cavalry charge on the opposing Byzantine formations, especially if they had engaged infantry units of the Varangian Guard, a prelude to the battle of Dyrrachium in 1081, but our primary material lets us down.

The most crucial battle, however, for the future of the Norman presence in Italy took place at Civitate on the 17th June 1053. The army that Pope Leo had managed to gather after his trip to Germany in March and his descent to southern Italy in May was indeed substantial. It consisted of troops from Capua, the Abruzzi and the Lombard areas of northern Capitanata, with some troops arriving also from Benevento and Spoleto. The southern Italian leaders that actively participated in the anti-Norman coalition were Duke Atenulf of Gaeta, his brother Count Lando of Aquino, the Counts of Teano, Guardia and Campomarino from the Biferno Valley in the Adriatic coast.⁷³² Further, this force was augmented by reinforcements from Germany, probably freebooters, prosecuted criminals or just men who had been influenced by the Pope, even though Henry III had recalled his Imperial troops earlier in March. These

⁷³¹ For this battle see: Amatus, II. 26; *Gesta*, I, 373-95, pp. 118-20; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 66, pp. 298-301; Malaterra, I. 10.

⁷³² *Gesta*, II, 148-176, p. 140.

troops consisted of an infantry⁷³³ force of several hundred, seven according to William of Apulia who is our most detailed source for this battle, but probably not more than three from Swabia with a certain Garnier and Albert as their leaders.⁷³⁴ But faced with this threat, the Normans were also forced to unite, whatever differences and tensions there may have been among them in the past. Humphrey of the Hautevilles had the overall command of the army, who had succeeded his brother Drogo as leader of the Melfi Normans two years earlier, having with him Peter and Walter the sons of Amicus, the Hautevilles' principal competitors, the Beneventan Normans, Gerald of Buonalbergo, Count Richard of Aversa (since 1049) and Robert Guiscard from Calabria. William estimated their number to 3,000 cavalry and a few infantry, a force which was quite large for the standards of the period and thus we can presume that a number about half of that might seem more reasonable.⁷³⁵

The Normans divided their forces into three main divisions, the centre commanded by Humphrey, the right wing by Richard of Aversa and the left was entrusted to Robert Guiscard. Opposite to him, Humphrey had the Swabian infantry, while in the wings were placed the rest of the Italian forces.⁷³⁶ Most of the armies of this early Norman period were divided into three or four units called battles or divisions (*acies*), with them, however, being lined up one behind the other.⁷³⁷ But there are many examples of this period where the battles were put in the field directly facing the enemy, with Civitate, Tinchebray, Hastings and Dyrrachium being just a few examples. It seemed more reasonable, when an army consisted of more than one nation, it had more than one general or if they wished to increase the length of their formation, like in the case of Civitate, to be arrayed into three parallel divisions all facing the enemy. But there was no well-established model to follow in the case of battle-arraying and it was up to the general to choose the right battle formation for his army.

⁷³³ William notes that the "Teutons" were not used to riding a horse, see: *Gesta*, II, 153-54, p. 140.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, II, 151-163, p. 140 .

⁷³⁵ *Gesta*, II, 122-138, p. 138.

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 183-191, p. 142; Amatus, III. 40; *Chronic. Casin.*, II, 84, pp. 331-3.

⁷³⁷ Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, p. 315.

The battle took place on the 17th June, with Richard's cavalry units directly attacking the enemy's left wing which melted away almost at once and was pursued by the advancing Norman horsemen. While this pursuit was on its way, the rest of the Norman cavalry had already engaged the enemy which, according to William, chose to retreat, apart from the Swabians who put a vigorous resistance and refused to leave their position. At this crucial point, we are aware of Richard's return from the pursuit of the Italians to attack the Swabian infantry, with his manoeuvre ending up in a massacre and one of the most decisive victories of the eleventh century.⁷³⁸ In this case, although the Normans were numerically inferior to the Papal army, the key to victory laid on their use their traditional heavy cavalry charge against a heterogeneous infantry army. Even the mere sight of a Norman cavalry charge must have been terrifying to the Italians, who many of them might not have been well-disciplined or trained and with low morale, with the onslaught and the retreat from the battle-field being the outcome. However, we must also stress the fact that, although the cavalry dominated the battle of Civitate, this battle can also demonstrate the power of heavy infantry as well, like the Germans who, even though they were heavily outnumbered, their discipline and experience allowed them to put a stout resistance. The retreat of the Lombard units of infantry cannot in any case diminish the importance of heavy infantry on a battlefield of this period and we can very well imagine that the result would have been rather different if the Papal army consisted of more units like the Swabians. Cavalry operating alone stood no chance against heavy and well-disciplined infantry – only when the formation had been disrupted was it possible to carry on with a heavy charge.⁷³⁹ But this issue will be analysed in more detail when I examine the battle of Dyrrachium.

⁷³⁸ *Gesta*, II, 211-256, pp. 142-146; *Amatus*, III. 40.

⁷³⁹ J. Gillingham, "An Age of Expansion, c. 1020-1204", *Medieval Warfare*, 64, 76-8; M. Bennett, "The Myth of the Military Supremacy of Knightly Cavalry", *Armies, Chivalry and Warfare in Medieval Britain and France, Proceedings of the 1995 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. M. Strickland, Paul Atkins, Stamford, 1998, pp. 304-16, especially pp. 310-16; S. Morillo, "The "Age of Cavalry" Revisited", *The Circle of War in the Middle Ages*, 45-58; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 46-49.

Crossing to Sicily, the first battle in the Norman quest of subduing the island occurred close to the fortress of Castrogiovanni and in the banks of the river Dittaino (summer 1061). The Norman army consisted of seven hundred knights and maybe the same numbers in infantry⁷⁴⁰ while the Muslims allegedly had 15,000 horsemen and 100,000 infantry, a surely exaggerated number given by Amatus.⁷⁴¹ However, it is almost certain that the Normans were heavily outnumbered. In this battle, they did not put their army in the field in three separate battalions, forming one attack-wave as in their victory at Civitate, but Roger was rather chosen to command the first wave and Robert would follow him with the second if necessary. Also, the Muslims too had formed three battle lines.⁷⁴² Unfortunately, the course of the battle is unknown to us, but it is suggested that the Norman cavalry charged once again upon their enemies in their usual manner, forcing the Muslims to retreat to the castle of Castrogiovanni with heavy casualties.⁷⁴³ The result of the battle, although it brought no significant military gains to the Normans, it was a tremendous boost for their morale and fame as warriors throughout Sicily and Italy.

After almost a year of no large scale fighting between the Normans and the Muslims, the newly arrived North-African army, along with the re-grouped Kalbite Muslims, marched towards the Norman strongholds in June 1063 and met their enemies in the banks of the river Cerami, some 10 kilometres from Roger's base at Troina. After a standstill of three days, the Normans won a confrontation at the castle of Cerami, where Serlo, commanding only thirty-six knights, forced an enemy force of about 3,000 cavalry men and many infantry to

⁷⁴⁰ Amatus gives the numbers of 1,000 for cavalry and infantry, but Guiscard had undoubtedly left some of his men to garrison Messina as Malaterra tells us, and so the number 700 must be closer to reality, see: Malaterra, 2. 17; Amatus, V. 23; Guiscard's number of 700 cavalry is also reported by Ibn al-Athir. See: Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, v. IIIi, n. 1, p. 75.

⁷⁴¹ Amatus, V. 23; *Chronic. Casin.*, III, 15, pp. 377-9; Malaterra is careful to distinguish between the local Sicilian Muslims and reinforcements that had arrived from Tunisia, see: Malaterra, 2. 17.

⁷⁴² Malaterra, 2. 17.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2. 17; Amatus, V. 23.

retreat.⁷⁴⁴ After this initial success, Roger's force of a hundred knights engaged the enemy by forming two battles (vanguard and rearguard). But the re-grouped Muslim army managed to repel the first Norman attack and move against the rearguard which was commanded by Roger. At this point, however, according to Malaterra, who is our only source for this battle, the divine intervention of St-George along with Roussel of Bailleuil's exhortations saved the day for the Normans who counter-attacked and forced their enemies to retreat. For the outcome of the battle, Malaterra gives the number of 15,000 dead and 20,000 Muslim prisoners, which even if it is grossly exaggerated, it confirms the fact that the 136 Norman knights were vastly outnumbered by their enemies.⁷⁴⁵

Only a few months before Guiscard's most ambitious military operation until that time – the siege of Bari – the last major pitched battle fought against the Muslims took place at Misilmeri (1068), some 12 kilometres south-east of the capital Palermo. The information given by Malaterra is sparse, but we are able to reconstruct the main chain of events. After launching a plundering expedition to the Palermo area, Roger's cavalry force came upon a sizeable mixed Zirid and Kalbite army at Misilmeri which was arranged in battle order, waiting for their arrival. We are unaware of the exact size of the two armies, but as usual, the Normans must have been many times outnumbered. Roger did not hesitate this time, as in Cerami, and after arranging his army's battle lines and having surprise on his side, launched an attack upon the enemy. Once again, the Muslims were unable to withstand a Norman cavalry attack and Malaterra tells us that hardly anyone survived to carry the news to Palermo.⁷⁴⁶

A number of important conclusions about the Norman strategy and battle-tactics employed in the south can be drawn here before we proceed to examination of the main topic of my thesis, the Norman invasions of Illyria. First of all we have to distinguish two periods in the

⁷⁴⁴ Certainly an exaggerating number: Malaterra, 2. 33.

⁷⁴⁵ Malaterra, 2. 33.

⁷⁴⁶ Malaterra, 2. 41.

Norman establishment in Italy, with the turning point being the battle at Civitate (1053), quite likely the most significant pitched battle in Italian medieval history. In the pre-Civitate period the Normans were mere auxiliary units, playing no significant role in the development of the political *status quo* of the region. Numbering a few hundreds, they were bands of elite cavalry mercenaries employed by the highest bidder, which included the Lombards, the Byzantines, the German Emperors and great ecclesiastical institutions in the Abruzzi. Two key-points were the establishment of two bands of them in Aversa (1030) and Melfi (1041/2). The first attempt to dislodge the Normans from Italy took place at Civitate in 1053, and the failure of the Papal army of Leo IX marked the beginning of the end for the Lombards and the Byzantines in the region. Calabria and great parts of mainland Apulia had been conquered by the end of the decade, and in 1061 Robert Guiscard and his brother invaded Sicily. The conquest of the island, however, was to prove a far tougher bet than the Normans would have anticipated, owing to the lack of sufficient numbers available and internal problems in Apulia, with Palermo falling eleven years later and the last Muslim garrison being expelled in 1091.

In the pre-Civitate period, pitched battles were relatively rare and with the numbers involved not exceeding a few thousands. It was only in Civitate were the Normans played a protagonist role, thus facing the Papal army and being heavily outnumbered by the Lombards. Having fought with and against their Lombard adversaries they were aware of their weaknesses and chose to apply their heavy cavalry charge, which had a tremendous effect on the enemy footsoldiers. After Civitate, pitched battles were also rare but this does not necessarily mean that the Normans were pursuing a “Vegetian Strategy” – the avoidance of battle unless the chances are overwhelmingly in their favour. Being the aggressors in the two operational theatres of the period – Apulia and Sicily – they actively pursued battle but it was only in Sicily that they got what they wished. In the three pitched battles fought in Sicily between 1061-68, we see the Normans once more adjusting their battle tactics to the enemy they had to face, being aware of the “quality” of troops they had to fight, meaning their discipline, morale and, of course, their equipment. In order to counter their numerical

inferiority they were deployed not into three separate cavalry divisions side-by-side, as in Civitate in 1053, but one behind the other forming two or three attacking waves, a tactic which makes the front of the army shorter but increases the depth of the formation thus giving greater impetus to the cavalry. Further, they were choosing a relatively broken, hilly or marshy terrain, which was also dominated by a river or an uphill castle, to diminish the numerical advantage of their enemies and the mobility of their cavalry. Two conclusions can be drawn at this point; first, military tactics play a much more significant role than numbers in a pitched battle, with the Normans using their cavalry charge to overbalance their numerical inferiority in the battlefield four times in fifteen years. Second, the Norman victories in the battlefields of Italy and Sicily could not determine by themselves the course of the events. Italy and Sicily were heavily fortified regions with numerous stone castles where their adversaries, the Byzantines and the Muslims (mainly after 1072) could lock themselves up and refuse battle, thus denying from the Normans their advantage of heavy cavalry attack.

Up to the 1060s, the key characteristics of the Norman expansionist strategy in the South were negotiation and tolerance. The paying of tributes was agreed, along with the building of outposts to control and raid a specific area, but no massacre of population is reported or any garrison installed – except, of course, in strategic cities. It seems as if the Normans were trying to conquer Apulia, Calabria and Sicily as quickly and as cheaply as possible! But after having expelled the Byzantines from the interior of the Apulia, Bari stood as the ultimate stumbling block to the Norman predominance in Italy. And with the inexperienced, outnumbered and ill-equipped Normans being no match to the Bariot fortifications, thus Robert Guiscard's choice of a land and naval blockade that would wear the defenders down. The newly "established" Norman navy, that had previously carried hundreds of knights across to Sicily in the first Norman amphibious operations of our period, proved capable of the task and the city surrendered in early spring of 1071. Palermo was next and exactly the same siege strategy was followed with equally successful results.

A final point that needs to be addressed has to do with the role of religion and the religious enthusiasm displayed by the Normans during their invasion of Sicily in the 1060s. Although we cannot characterise the Norman invasion of Sicily as a Crusade, we can identify it as a Holy War and place it among other holy wars of the eleventh century, like the Spanish Reconquista.⁷⁴⁷ We have already seen the role played by Rome in encouraging the Normans to invade the island, but what specific examples of religious enthusiasm can we identify in the histories of Amatus and Malaterra?

Amatus notes that “he [Guiscard] called his knights to take Sicily, saying, ‘I should like to deliver the Christians and Catholics who are bound in servitude to the Saracens ... and wreak vengeance for this injury to God’.”⁷⁴⁸ In his pre-battle speech before the battle at Castrogiovanni in 1061, Amatus puts the following in Guiscard’s mouth: “The strength of our faith has the flame of the Holy Spirit, because in the name of the Holy Trinity we shall take this mountain of the dung of heresy and accumulated perversity. God is powerful enough to give us victory over the multitude of infidels...”⁷⁴⁹ But the most important evidence comes from Malaterra regarding the battle of Cerami in 1063. In his attempt to encourage the heavily outnumbered Normans to attack the Muslims, Roussel of Bailleuil is reported to have said that “It is certain that, with God leading us, the enemy will not be able to stand before us. This people [Muslims] has rebelled against God, and power which is not directed by God is quickly exhausted.”⁷⁵⁰ And it was while rushing against their enemies, inspired by this speech as they were, that the Norman knights witnessed St-George leading the charge in his white

⁷⁴⁷ Robinson uses the term “Proto-Crusade”: I.S. Robinson, *The Papacy, 1073-1198*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 324ff; for the debate on the terminology of *Holy War* and *Crusade* and what applies to the eleventh century religious wars, see: C. Tyerman, *God’s War, a New History of the Crusades*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 2006, pp. 43-57; J. Riley-Smith, *What Were the Crusades?*, (4th ed.), Palgrave, Basingstoke, 2009, 1-26.

⁷⁴⁸ Amatus, V. 12.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., V. 23.

⁷⁵⁰ Malaterra, 2. 33.

horse and carrying a white standard with a cross tied to the tip of his lance, thus their battle-cry “God and St-George”. St-George is the most well-known “warrior-saint” of Christianity and the white banner with the cross may be a reference to Constantine’s *labarum* carried at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312. But most important is what Malaterra writes about the aftermath of the Norman victory at Cerami: “The Pope [Alexander II] sent both his apostolic blessing and absolution from sin to the count [Roger] and to all others who were helping him to win Sicily from the pagans. The Pope also sent a banner from the Roman see ... under which the count and his men were to rise up and wage war against the Saracens.” Absolution from sins was a significant development, although not a novelty as it was used by Leo IV and John VIII as early as the ninth century, while the banner of St-Peter remind us of William II’s invasion of England three years later.⁷⁵¹

What is interesting about our chroniclers’ accounts on the Norman expansion in Sicily is that, even though they stress numerous times the religious toleration that was demonstrated by Guiscard’s and Roger’s men throughout the conquest of the island, someone can clearly notice their struggle to highlight the religious nature of their fight against the “infidels”. Of course, these pre-battle speeches that dominate Amatus’ and Malaterra’s narratives are a topos, even though similar “morale-boosting” speeches might have been made. But the exact words reflect how the “Italian-Norman” chroniclers perceived the fight against the Muslims – as a Holy War to recover lands that were once Christian.⁷⁵²

⁷⁵¹ C. Erdmann, *Die Entstehung des Kreuzzugsgedankens*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart, 1955, pp. 23, 139-40, 172-73, 181-83. There is an English translation: *The origin of the idea of crusade*, tr. M. W. Baldwin and W. Goffart, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977.

⁷⁵² Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 155-57.

8. Robert Guiscard's invasion of Illyria. The first stage, from the capitulation of Corfu to the victory over the Byzantine army (spring – autumn 1081)

In order to fully understand the significance of the conference at Ceprano that took place in June 1080, along with its implications for the future of the Italian peninsula and the Norman invasion of Illyria we have to examine, albeit briefly, the Papal-Norman relations in the age of Gregory VII.⁷⁵³ Gregory, almost as soon as he was elected in the Papal Curia, became openly hostile towards the Normans, thus returning to the papal policy of the pre-1059 period (established by Leo IX, Victor II and Stephen IX) when the Normans were regarded as enemies who endangered the territories of St-Peter.⁷⁵⁴ The most important cause that changed Rome's policies was the continuous inroads made by Norman troops into the Abruzzi area and specifically around Benevento, territories under Papal overlordship since the summer of 1073.⁷⁵⁵ Attempts by abbot Desiderius of Montecassino to set-up a meeting between the two parties at Benevento fell on deaf ears and during the following winter (1073/4) Gregory took a step further. In February of 1074 he called upon William I of Burgundy for help against Robert Guiscard, specifically directing the "fideles sancti Petri" to a campaign to "bring the Normans to peace and then cross to Constantinople to bring aid to Christians."⁷⁵⁶ Even though this expedition failed to materialise, it provide us with the first

⁷⁵³ For more on this, see: H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1998, pp. 425-39; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 194-209; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 399-415; I.S. Robinson, *The Papacy, 1073-1198*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 367-97; *The Register of Pope Gregory VII, 1073-85*, tr. H.E.J. Cowdrey, Clarendon, Oxford, 2002.

⁷⁵⁴ Robinson, *The Papacy, 1073-1198*, p. 369.

⁷⁵⁵ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 1.18a, pp. 20-1.

⁷⁵⁶ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 1. 49, pp. 54-5.

example of the manipulation of a Crusade for political purposes, openly directed against the Apulian Normans.⁷⁵⁷

The continuous depredations of the Normans in the Abruzzi, along with the combined operations of Richard of Capua and Robert Guiscard against Salerno (1076), Naples (1077) and Benevento (1078) resulted in both being excommunicated twice by Gregory, in Lent 1075 and again in February 1078.⁷⁵⁸ But we have to bear in mind that diplomatic relations in the Italian peninsula were largely depended upon a third party that, theoretically, regarded southern Italy as part of its *imperium*, meaning the German Emperors. Gregory was in open conflict with Henry IV since the latter's involvement in the election of the Archbishop of Milan (spring 1076) and him declaring Gregory deposed through a council of German bishops.⁷⁵⁹ And it was this breach of alliance between Rome and Germany that was about to see a brief rapprochement of the former party with the Normans, something that was convenient for both parties in maintaining the *status quo* in Italy.⁷⁶⁰ Gregory had opened hostilities in two distant fronts and that was something he could ill afford, let alone risking a possible alliance between Henry and the Normans, which came close to materializing in the summer of 1076.⁷⁶¹

Gregory and the Normans were, once more, at odds due to the latter's siege operations against Salerno, Naples and Benevento, as I mentioned earlier, resulting to the second excommunication in 1078. And even though by that time the Pope's relations with Germany had improved significantly, with Henry submitting to Gregory at Canosa in January 1077, a

⁷⁵⁷ H.E.J. Cowdrey, "Pope Gregory VII's 'Crusading' Plans of 1074", *Outremer, Studies in the History of the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem*, ed. B.Z. Kedar, R.C. Smail, Yad Izhak Ben-Svi Institute, Jerusalem, 1982, 27-40.

⁷⁵⁸ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 201-4.

⁷⁵⁹ For these events, along with Henry's excommunication by Gregory, see: *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 3. 10a, pp. 187-93.

⁷⁶⁰ Something quite interesting is Roger's absolution from his sins while fighting the Muslims in Sicily: *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 3. 11, pp. 193-4.

⁷⁶¹ Amatus, VII. 27.

solution to the internal problems facing the Emperor reached a dead-end about a year later. Once again Gregory was facing an open confrontation in two fronts and it was obvious that the alliance with the Normans would be asked. Thus, after the conference at Ceprano between Gregory VII, Robert Guiscard and Jordan of Capua, that took place in June 1080, we have the final settlement between the Normans and Rome which saw the lifting of the excommunication and Robert's investment with his lands that he previously held from Nicholas II and Alexander II since 1059, even those which he had "taken in defiance of the Pope", meaning the disputed lands of Salerno, Amalfi and the Abruzzi area.⁷⁶² This agreement was crucial, not only for the Pope who desperately needed Norman military support against Henry IV's Imperial Army, after the latter's excommunication in March 1080, but for the Norman Duke who was anxiously preparing for his Illyrian campaign. The latter could not afford to have such an enemy back home while he was fighting on the other side of the Adriatic, bearing in mind that the last rebellion in Apulia having taken place only one year before (winter 1078/9).⁷⁶³ For both Gregory and Robert, their alliance was dictated by the current political climate which they could not possibly ignore. Peace with Gregory VII, after six years of almost continuous strife between them, left the Norman Duke free to consider his most ambitious plan up to that moment, his campaign against the Byzantine Empire.

The Norman preparations that begun in Salerno in the summer of 1080, right after the conclusion of the treaty of Ceprano, saw the appearance of the deposed Emperor Michael VII at the Norman court, something which provided Guiscard with the pretext he needed to justify his campaign as a "restoration mission". Of course, this convenient story is far from true and this was what Guiscard hoped the Byzantines would easily fall for and thus follow

⁷⁶² For the conference at Ceprano, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 206; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, p. 257; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 414-15; The text of Guiscard's investment by Gregory can be found in: *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 8. 1a, b, c, pp. 364-5.

⁷⁶³ For the 1078/79 Apulian rebellion, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 241-43; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 254-55.

him against the usurper of the Imperial throne Nicephoros Botaneiates. For this, he also had the full support of Rome that had officially recognised his expedition as an effort “to restore Emperor Michael VII to the Byzantine throne”. On the 25th July 1080, Gregory VII called upon the bishops of Apulia and Calabria and all the “fideles sancti Petri” to go “resolutely in true faith with no differences of mind to the help and defence of the aforesaid emperor”, offering absolution from their sins as the heavenly reward for their actions.⁷⁶⁴ But before going into the examination of the Norman campaign we should ask how far back do the relations between Robert Guiscard and Michael VII date?

Michael VII was not the first Emperor to have sought for the Norman alliance. The negotiations between the Duke of Apulia and Constantinople can be traced back to the years of Romanus IV who had also sought to conclude an alliance treaty, sometime in 1071, although it is not clear precisely when.⁷⁶⁵ The civil conflict in the capital and the coming of Michael VII interrupted the negotiations, but the new Emperor was quick to acknowledge the significance of an alliance with the Apulian Normans, mainly for the provision of ample bodies of mercenaries for the Byzantine army. Thus, he reopened the talks with Robert Guiscard by sending a letter, either at the end of 1071 or the beginning of 1072. However this treaty, which was to be ratified by a marriage alliance between Guiscard’s daughter and Michael’s brother Constantine, was not to be on equal terms; by the letter sent it seems quite clear that the Byzantines were attempting to draw the Normans into their own world by lavishly giving away titles. According to the terms of the marriage treaty, Robert Guiscard was to promise to respect and defend the Imperial territories with all the forces he could muster against the enemies of the Emperor.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁴ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 8. 6, pp. 371-2; I.S. Robinson, “Gregory VII and the Soldiers of Christ”, *History*, 58 (1973), 182-83.

⁷⁶⁵ C.N. Sathas, *Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*, Venice-Paris, 1872-94, vol. V, p. 387; W.B. McQueen, “Relations between the Normans and Byzantium, 1071-1112”, *Byzantion*, 56 (1986), 429.

⁷⁶⁶ Sathas, *Bibliotheca graeca medii aevi*, V, p. 387.

Robert Guiscard proved smart enough not to be drawn into this “trap” and turn himself into a “vassal-Duke” of the Empire. The negotiations carried on throughout the following year, with another letter being sent probably at the end of 1072 or the beginning of 1073.⁷⁶⁷ It was the chrysobull of August 1074, however, that finally ratified the alliance between the Normans and Constantinople, with Michael’s newly born son being “offered” as a stronger footing while we also observe a return to the 1071/2 policy of augmenting the importance of Byzantine power over the Norman authority in southern Italy.⁷⁶⁸ What actually “persuaded” Guiscard to give in to Michael’s proposals was the immense political pressure applied by the Pope, Gregory VII, triggered by Michael’s exhortations (summer 1073) for a military campaign against the Seljuks to save the Empire “after the Normans [Guiscard] have been pacified”.⁷⁶⁹

In relation to Robert Guiscard’s pretext of acting in favour of the deposed Emperor Michael VII,⁷⁷⁰ another point that needs to be presented is the deeper reasons behind Robert Guiscard’s invasion of the Byzantine Empire.⁷⁷¹ Undoubtedly, the marriage alliance between Robert and Michael, along with the “shame” that the latter’s deposition must have brought to Robert’s daughter would have been a blow to him but it is rather naive to think that the Duke would have launched such an expedition for these rather trivial reasons. In the words of Anna Comnena: “He [Guiscard] was always thinking out some more ambitious project. He seized on the pretext of his connection by marriage with the Emperor [Michael VII] and dreamed of

⁷⁶⁷ McQueen, “Relations between the Normans and Byzantium”, 430.

⁷⁶⁸ The full text of the chrysobull can be found in: H. Bibicou, “Une page d’histoire diplomatique de Byzance au XIe siècle: Michael VII Doukas, Robert Guiscard et la pension des dignitaires”, *Byzantion*, 29 (1959), 43-75.

⁷⁶⁹ Gregory’s correspondence with William of Burgundy can be found in: E. Emerton, *The Correspondence of Pope Gregory VII*, New York, 1932, pp. 22-28.

⁷⁷⁰ For the use of an impostor to act as the deposed Michael VII, see: *Alexiad*, I. xii, pp. 58-61; Sewter, pp. 58-61; *Gesta*, IV. 260-272, p. 218.

⁷⁷¹ McQueen, “Relations between the Normans and Byzantium”, 439-442.

ascending the throne himself.”⁷⁷² The Imperial Crown is certainly considered one of Robert Guiscard’s ambitions, influenced by the Byzantine culture, language, state organization and economic prosperity, not only of the capital but of Byzantine Italy as well, things that were undoubtedly admired by all the Normans. But could this have been Guiscard’s only motive?

Another reason has to do with the Byzantine involvement in the Apulian rebellions against Robert Guiscard’s authority since the mid-1060s. Although the Byzantine military presence in Italy was failing, already since the 1040s, the Byzantine diplomacy seemed more ever-present than ever, especially if we examine the role of the governor of Dyrrachium, Perenos, in providing money for the 1067-8 Apulian revolt that for a time significantly undermined Guiscard’s authority and brought the Sicilian and Apulian expansion to a standstill.⁷⁷³ Two of the ringleaders of the aforementioned rebellion sought refuge at the Emperor’s Court, namely Joscelin of Molfetta and Roger Tutebove, while Guiscard’s nephew Abelard, himself a protagonist of almost every major Apulian insurrection in the 1060s-70s also sought refuge at Constantinople after 1078 and was one of Alexius Comnenus’ main negotiators between Constantinople and the Papacy in 1081-2, as we will see further on. Already since the conquest of Bari in 1071, Apulia had seen two major rebellions that significantly diminished Robert Guiscard’s resources in money and manpower and, most importantly, challenged his authority as Duke of Apulia and Calabria.⁷⁷⁴ Although the involvement of Byzantine agents in these insurrections cannot be certain, Robert Guiscard is quite possible to have held them responsible. The Duke needed to act in order to avoid any other potentially threatening revolt

⁷⁷² *Alexiad*, I. xii, p. 57; Sewter, p. 57.

⁷⁷³ For the 1067/8 Apulian rebellion and Byzantium’s role, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 133-4; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 177-8, 182; Norwich, *The Normans in the South*, pp. 164-5.

⁷⁷⁴ For the 1072/3 and 1078 Apulian rebellions, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 240-44; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 223-25, 254-56.

in his core territories of Apulia, and the only way was to strike at the source of all the trouble, the Illyrian capital Dyrrachium and possibly Constantinople itself.⁷⁷⁵

A factor that also has to be mentioned is the nature of Robert Guiscard's rule in relation with his vassal lords. Even though Robert was invested by Pope Nicholas II as Duke of Apulia and Calabria, in 1059, that does not mean that his authority suddenly became unquestionable and unchallenged by his powerful counts. Especially those related to him by blood, like Robert of Conversano, Geoffrey of Montescaglioso and members of the powerful Amicus kin, who belonged to the second generation of Normans in the peninsula were unlikely to take orders from Robert Guiscard and follow him if they had no significant gains to come back home with.⁷⁷⁶ Throughout the 1030s, the 1040s and the 1050s, a period when the Byzantine resistance in Apulia and Calabria was collapsing rapidly, and more and more lands were lavishly given away to these counts, no revolt took place. But when the Sicilian theatre of war came to a standstill in the 1060s and the Byzantines had locked themselves up to their strongly fortified coastal cities in Apulia, then the situation became even more difficult for the Norman Duke. In the 1070s, the enemies of the Normans in Italy had been defeated and there were no more lands to be given away to the increasingly demanding Apulian counts. The quest for more lands in the opposite side of the Adriatic can be seen as a major reason for the Illyrian campaign.

The military operations in Illyria (spring – autumn 1081)

Trying to assess the size of the expeditionary force that sailed from Otranto in the spring of 1081 is a challenging task due to the contradictory estimates of the Byzantine and Norman sources. According to Anna Comnena the Norman expeditionary force consisted of some

⁷⁷⁵ A very good study of the level of contact between the successive Byzantine governments with Italy can be found in: Loud, "Anna Komnena", 41-46.

⁷⁷⁶ For more on the relations between Guiscard and his senior magnates, see: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 234-46.

30,000 men, with 150 ships of all types carrying them across the Adriatic at around 200 men and horses on each ship.⁷⁷⁷ Thirty thousand men is surely an exaggerated figure given by Anna to enhance, in her readers' eyes, Alexius' victory over the Normans, while we have also examined the degree of caution by which we should consider such estimations. Malaterra's figures of 1,300 knights, "as those present have testified", is surely closer to the truth, and even if this number seems relatively small we can say that, at least, it would represent the elite core of Guiscard's army, if we follow Malaterra's comments that the largest portion of it was a "poorly armed mob" (*imbecille vulgus*).⁷⁷⁸ Malaterra's comment about the quality of the Norman expeditionary army is also suggested by Anna Comnena, who notes: "From all quarters of Lombardy he [Guiscard] gathered them [conscripts], over age and under age, pitiable objects who had never seen armour even in their dreams ...".⁷⁷⁹ Other sources, like Orderic Vitalis, put the figure up to no more than 10,000 men,⁷⁸⁰ Peter the Deacon notes 15,000 men⁷⁸¹ while Romuald of Salerno talks about 700 horsemen – a much plausible figure as well.⁷⁸²

Anna also gives us the names of certain types of ships which the Normans used for the transportation of their army: "Dromons, triremes, biremes and sermones and other transport vessels in great numbers were made ready".⁷⁸³ Since the princess was certainly no expert in Byzantine ship-building and naval warfare, she has probably confused the *dromons* with the *chelandia* which were more frequently seen in the waters of the Adriatic and the Tyrrhenian Seas. And it must have been the *chelandia* if the Normans were to "meet the enemy in full armour and on the beaches,"⁷⁸⁴ as this type of transport ship was equipped with ramps

⁷⁷⁷ *Alexiad*, I. xvi, pp. 74-5; Sewter, p. 69.

⁷⁷⁸ Malaterra, 3. 24.

⁷⁷⁹ *Alexiad*, I. xiv, pp. 68-9; Sewter, p. 65.

⁷⁸⁰ Orderic Vitalis, VII, p. 16.

⁷⁸¹ *Chron. Casin.*, III, 49, p. 429.

⁷⁸² Romuald of Salerno, s.a. 1081, p. 194.

⁷⁸³ *Alexiad*, III. ix, p. 170; Sewter, p. 124.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, I. xvi, pp. 74-5; Sewter, p. 69.

(*climakes*) to unload horses in the beach.⁷⁸⁵ Also, triremes did not exist in Mediterranean waters since the early Roman times and, again, Anna is probably influenced by her readings of ancient Greek and Roman works.⁷⁸⁶ As for the crews that manned the vessels of the Norman fleet, they consisted of indigenous Italian elements that had served in the Norman navy since the Messina landing in 1061, namely Apulians and Calabrians of either Lombard or Greek origin, while it is likely that ships from Amalfi and Muslims would have been used as well.⁷⁸⁷ William of Apulia also informs us of the existence of Ragusan elements in the Norman fleet,⁷⁸⁸ something which confirms an alliance between Robert and the semi-independent Slav principalities of the eastern Adriatic coast.⁷⁸⁹ Perhaps Guiscard's relations with the Slav settlers in Italy, quite cordial already since the 1050s as we have seen, played a role in winning the alliance of these principalities.

Robert Guiscard gave orders for his fleet to sail from Otranto⁷⁹⁰ in the month of May 1081, after having appointed his son Roger Borsa as heir to his dukedom, along with Robert of Loritello⁷⁹¹ and Geoffrey of Conversano⁷⁹² as his senior advisors.⁷⁹³ Before that, however,

⁷⁸⁵ Bennett believes that the transport ships of the Normans at Dyrrachium were Arabic *tarridas* that had a square stern with two stem-posts, which enabled there to be a ramp that could be lowered to unload the horses. Although possible, I consider the Byzantine influence more likely. See: Bennett, "Amphibious Operations", 54-55.

⁷⁸⁶ The typical warship of the Imperial Roman period was the *liburnian galley* which was relatively small, had two banks of oars and a square sail in a single mast.

⁷⁸⁷ *Alexiad*, IV. i, p. 188; Sewter, p. 135.

⁷⁸⁸ *Gesta*, IV. 134-5, p. 210.

⁷⁸⁹ For these principalities, see: Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, pp. 117-156; "Balkan Borderlands", *C.H.B.E.*, 664-82; Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth*, pp. 219-223; Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, pp. 248-91.

⁷⁹⁰ *Gesta*, IV. 122-124, p. 210; Malaterra, 3. 24; Orderic Vitalis, VII, p. 16; Anna erroneously mentions Brindisi as the port of embarkation: *Alexiad*, III. xii, p. 181; Sewter, p. 131.

⁷⁹¹ For Robert, see: Malaterra, 1. 15, 33, 34; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 133; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 148-50, 226-7.

⁷⁹² Geoffrey participated in the 1067/8 and 1078/9 Apulian rebellions. He also followed Guiscard in the 1084 campaign. See: Martin, *La Pouille*, pp. 736-7; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*,

he had already dispatched his son Bohemond, along with a small force carried in fifteen ships,⁷⁹⁴ in a reconnaissance mission to capture Corfu and Avlona probably a few weeks before. Avlona, due to its protected gulf which offered an excellent point of disembarkation, along with its strategic location in the Epirotic coast, was crucial for the Norman operation.⁷⁹⁵ Bohemond managed to capture Avlona, Kanina and Orikon (*Hiericho*), the three most important fortresses of the southern coastal approaches of the region of Dyrrachium,⁷⁹⁶ but he failed against the walls of the Corfiot citadel⁷⁹⁷ and withdrew to the opposite fortified Epirotic site of Vouthrotos (*Butrinto - Βουθρωτός*), at a distance of about 16 kilometres, to await his father's arrival.⁷⁹⁸

After Robert Guiscard's crossing of the Adriatic with the main fleet of warships and transport ships, he headed towards Avlona to disembark his army and join his son. Before reaching Avlona, however, he launched an attack towards the Corfiot capital's citadel that had resisted his son's forces, probably intending to have it as a forward supply base. After

pp. 132-3, 241-44; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 177-9, especially n. 5 in p. 179; Cahen, *La Regime Feodal*, p. 55.

⁷⁹³ *Gesta*, IV. 195-97, p. 214; See: Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 241, 244; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 254-6; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, p. 451; J. Flori, *Bohemond d'Antioch, Chevalier d'Aventure*, Payot, Paris, 2007, p. 40.

⁷⁹⁴ Malaterra, 3. 24.

⁷⁹⁵ Avlona controlled the access to the southern Vjossa river valley, and its port is also the closest proximity (around 70 nautical miles) to the opposite coasts of the Terra d'Otranto.

⁷⁹⁶ Three other fortresses also existed to control the inland passes just south of the Dyrrachium area, while a *kastron* at Achrida also existed to dominate the lake. See: Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, pp. 160-64.

⁷⁹⁷ For more on the Corfiot citadel, see: D. Tsougarakes, «Η βυζαντινή Κορυφώ: κάστρον ή πόλις;», *Πρακτικά Διεθνούς Συνεδρίου «Κέρκυρα, μία μεσογειακή σύνθεση: νησιωτισμός, διασυνδέσεις, ανθρώπινα περιβάλλοντα, 16^{ος}-19^{ος} αι.*, Kerkyra, (1998), 215-28; *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, ed. I. Georgopoulou-d' Amico, Hellenic Ministry of Culture – Archaeological Receipts Fund, Athens, 2008, pp. 46-49.

⁷⁹⁸ *Alexiad*, I. xiv, pp. 69-70; Sewter, p. 66; Malaterra, 3. 24; for the fortifications of Vouthrotos, see: A. Ducellier, “Dernieres decouvertes sur les sites albanais du Moyen Age”, *Archeologia*, 78 (January 1975), 45.

landing troops at Cassiopi,⁷⁹⁹ a favourable point for the disembarkation of the army in the north of the island, he proceeded south to commence the siege.⁸⁰⁰ The Corfiot citadel surrendered “most willingly” on the 21st May and paid tribute to Guiscard,⁸⁰¹ with the later resuming his operations and taking his army across the straits of Corfu. In another side-expedition, a part of the Norman fleet occupied the port of Vonitsa (*Bundicia*), further south into the Amvrakikos Gulf.⁸⁰² This side-expedition makes us wonder what were units of the Norman army doing so far south from their main target of Dyrrachium. It is not likely that Robert may have wished to draw units of the Byzantine Army away from Illyria, simply because the provincial units of the western Greek mainland were in complete disarray as we have seen in a previous chapter. Unless the town was mistaken for a wealthy merchant port, which as far as I am aware of it was not,⁸⁰³ its capture can be connected to what Anna was saying about Guiscard’s “initial” plans of capturing Nicopolis, not far from Vonitsa on the Epirotic coast, and Naupaktos, further south-east at the entrance of the Gulf of Patras.⁸⁰⁴ The conquest of Naupaktos would have opened the way for further naval raids against some of the wealthiest cities, not only of the southern Greek mainland but of the entire Empire due to their silk industry, namely Corinth, Athens and Thebes, as it happened during the 1147-49

⁷⁹⁹ The castle of Cassiopi was built later, in the mid-twelfth century, and remained in use until its abandonment in the sixteenth century. See: *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, pp. 146-47.

⁸⁰⁰ *Alexiad*, I. xvi, p. 76; III. xii, p. 183; Sewter, pp. 69, 131; *Gesta*, IV. 201-205, p. 214; Malaterra, 3. 24; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1080.

⁸⁰¹ Chalandon thinks that the Corfiots must have cooperated with Guiscard. Perhaps he promised them lucrative trading privileges. See: Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. 73.

⁸⁰² This side-expedition is mentioned only by William of Apulia: *Gesta*, IV. 207, p. 214. It is not known whether the castle of Vonitsa was built in the early Byzantine period as the town, but the castle was a powerful stronghold of the first despots of Epirus in the thirteenth century: *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, pp. 142-45.

⁸⁰³ The town of Arta, a few kilometers to the north coast of the Gulf, which was later besieged by Bohemond in 1082, was a major trading port for the Venetians in the twelfth century, although we know nothing about the city before that. See: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, p. 191.

⁸⁰⁴ *Alexiad*, I. xvi, p. 75; Sewter, p. 69.

Norman expedition in the Ionian and Aegean Seas.⁸⁰⁵ Thebes was already a great trading centre of the Empire since the eighth century due to its silk industry, with numerous Armenian, Jews, Venetians and other traders having it as its base, with the city though being almost completely destroyed by the Norman raids of 1147. Corinth had the same fate as Thebes, enjoying an economic prosperity until the mid-twelfth century but the Normans attacked the city in 1147 and transferred all of its silk workers back to Palermo, causing its demise.⁸⁰⁶

After having secured the area around Avlona, Guiscard and Bohemond proceeded north against Dyrrachium, with the former taking command of the fleet and the latter taking the land route with a part of the army. Bohemond marched northwards without any severe interruptions, managing to take Levani at the Semeni River,⁸⁰⁷ but the Norman fleet was much less fortunate. At cape Glossa (*Γλώσσα*), in today's Cheimara region at the tip of the Avlona Gulf, Robert Guiscard encountered a major storm that literally crippled his fleet and sank a large number of its ships. Although we are unaware of the exact number of ships that were destroyed or put out of action because of the storm, it certainly was a big setback for Guiscard's ambitious plans, thus his decision to remain at Glabinitza, to the south of cape Glossa, for one week to allow for his troops to recoup.⁸⁰⁸ However, despite these significant losses, the Norman heavy cavalry and infantry had taken the overland route to live off the land, thus escaping unscathed by this disaster.

⁸⁰⁵ *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Niketas Choniates*, tr. H. J. Magoulias, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1984, chapter II, book II, pp. 43-45.

⁸⁰⁶ Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 382-3; Chalandon, *Jean II Comnène, (1118-1143) et Manuel I Comnène, (1143-1180)*, pp. 317ff.; idem, *Domination Normande* vol. II, pp. 136ff.; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 86-7; Z. Tsirpanles, *The Medieval West (5th-15th century)*, Vaniass, Thessaloniki, 2004, p. 242; *Encyclopedia Papyrous Larous Britannica*, Papyros, Athens, 1981, vols. 28, 35, pp. 165, 184.

⁸⁰⁷ *Anonymi Vaticani Historia Sicula, RIS*, vol. 8, col. 769.

⁸⁰⁸ *Alexiad*, III. xii, pp. 184-5; Sewter, pp. 132-3; *Gesta*, IV. 218-224, p. 216.

Alarmed by the events, and while waiting for his army to assemble, Alexius did not remain idle but rather took immediate steps, to boost the morale of the Corfiot Greek-Orthodox population by upgrading the bishopric of *Kerkyra and Paxoi islands* to the status of a metropolis;⁸⁰⁹ to improve the defences of the city of Dyrrachium;⁸¹⁰ and to set in motion the Byzantine diplomacy in search for allies against the Norman Duke. Alexius' first action was to replace the governor of Dyrrachium,⁸¹¹ George Monomachatos, with his faithful friend and brother-in-law George Paleologos.⁸¹² This tactic of appointing members of the royal family in crucial administrative posts, both in the capital and in the provinces, with typical examples being George Paleologos, Alexius' brother Isaac and their mother Anna Dalassena, Constantine Doukas and Nicephoros Melissinos, and even though this was not out of the ordinary for the eleventh century Byzantine administrative system – Michael VII Doukas had also relied in family members during his reign – it has not been seen in such a scale before. We have to bear in mind that the Emperor was a usurper of the throne and had been in power for a few weeks, thus he had not firmly established his authority over the provincial officials. He had every right to be afraid of Monomachatos' loyalty because Monomachatos was placed as governor of Dyrrachium by Botaneiates and remained faithful to him.⁸¹³ In addition, Anna repeatedly accuses Monomachatos of secret and treacherous dealings with Guiscard as

⁸⁰⁹ G. Charizanes, «Ο μητροπολίτης Κέρκυρας Νικόλαος και η βυζαντινο-νορμανδική σύγκρουση στο Ιόνιο (τέλη του 11^{ου} αι.)», *Byzantiaka*, 24 (2004), 197-210.

⁸¹⁰ *Alexiad*, III. ix, pp. 172-3; Sewter, p. 126.

⁸¹¹ For the placement of senior members of the Imperial family in high posts in the capital and the provinces, including Dyrrachium, see: P. Francopan, “The Imperial Governors of Dyrrakhion in the reign of Alexios I Komnenos”, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 27 (2002), 65-103; idem, “Kinship and the distribution of power in Komnenian Byzantium”, *English Historical Review*, 495 (2007), 1–34; J.-C. Cheynet, *Pouvoir et Contestations a Byzance, 963-1210*, Paris, 1990, pp. 359ff.

⁸¹² George Paleologos was an experienced military commander and the staunchest supporter of Alexius' rebellion. See: *The Oxford dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. III, 1557-60.

⁸¹³ *Alexiad*, I. xvi, pp. 78-9, Sewter, p. 71.

well.⁸¹⁴ If we are to believe William of Apulia's comments, Monomachatos did engage in talks with Guiscard when he learned that Botaneiates was dethroned.⁸¹⁵

In order to disrupt Guiscard's communications with his Apulian dominions Alexius needed a combat fleet of his own. But the only certain thing is that the Byzantine naval units available were not up for the task. The squadrons that were to protect the coastal non-maritime themes, like Illyria, Cephalonia and Nicopolis consisted of light sailing ships, with their main duty being the patrolling of the coasts and major ports. Thus Alexius' immediate decision to call for his vassal and old ally, the maritime republic of Venice. In theory, Byzantium and Venice had close ties since the fifth century, with the latter becoming a part of the Byzantine Empire during Justinian's expeditions against the Ostrogoths in the second half of the sixth century. In 992 we have the first military-commercial agreement between Byzantium and Venice, signed by Basil II and Peter II Orseolo (991-1009), by which Venice promised naval assistance whenever the Byzantine Emperors would plan to send an army in southern Italy in exchange for commercial privileges in Constantinople and Abydos.⁸¹⁶ And it was Venice who relieved Bari from a long Arab siege in 1002.⁸¹⁷ Although much had changed since the death of Basil II in 1025, the Venetians still remained vassals of the Byzantine government, staying faithful to their alliance not because of the presence of any Imperial troops in their city but for a very different reason. Constantinople and the rest of the Byzantine ports were the treasure houses of Venetian trade, which was their gateway to Western European markets, while Venice also needed Byzantium as an ally against the growing ambition of the German Emperors.

⁸¹⁴ *Alexiad*, I. xvi, pp. 78-9; III. ix, pp. 171-2; Sewter, pp. 71, 125-6; this is also noted by William of Apulia: *Gesta*, IV. 228-230, p. 216; In fact, after his replacement Monomachatos defected to Bodin, the ruler of the semi-independent principality of Dioclea in the Adriatic coast: *Alexiad*, III. xii, p. 181; Sewter, p. 131.

⁸¹⁵ *Gesta*, IV. 215-217, p. 216.

⁸¹⁶ Von Falkenhausen, "Byzantine Italy", 144, especially n. 40.

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *La Dominazione bizantina*, pp. 53ff.

When Alexius appealed to his subjects in the summer of 1081 he knew that the Venetians would respond favourably for an additional reason. They had a common enemy who was trying to establish himself firmly on both sides of the Adriatic, thus being able to block the entrance of the sea if he wished to do so and severely cripple the Venetian trade.⁸¹⁸ In addition, a significant percentage of Dyrrachium's population was from Amalfi and Venice, traders who had settled in the entrance of the ancient Via Egnatia that led to Constantinople, through Thessaloniki and Adrianople, many decades ago.⁸¹⁹ The Doge Domenico Silvio (1070-84) did not hesitate to send a large squadron to the rescue of Dyrrachium in exchange for, as Anna tells us: "some rewards were pledged, others granted at once. All their desire would be satisfied and confirmed by chrysobulls, provided they were not in conflict with the interests of the Roman Empire."⁸²⁰ The commercial privileges of Venice were officially ratified by the Emperor in the following May (1082) and undoubtedly were the stimulus for the huge economic growth of Venice in the twelfth century.⁸²¹

The most pressing danger for the Empire, however, at this stage was the Sultanate of Rum, and Alexius' top priority was to secure his flanks before embarking into a campaign so far from his home base. The Sultanate of Rum, under Sulleyman-ibn-Qutlumus I (1077/8-86), had been established shortly before the rise of Alexius to the throne, after being a vassal state

⁸¹⁸ In 1074, Amicus II of Molfetta and Giovenazzo had attacked the Dalmatian coasts, resulting in a Venetian naval expedition that swept the Normans off Dalmatia. See: D.M. Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 55-6; Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, pp. 281-2.

⁸¹⁹ *Alexiad*, V. i, p. 223; Sewter, p. 155; A. Ducellier, *La façade maritime de l'Albanie au moyen âge: Durazzo et Valona du XIe au XVe siècle*, Institute for Balkan Studies, Thessaloniki, 1981, pp. 71, 105.

⁸²⁰ *Alexiad*, IV. ii, pp. 191-2; Sewter, p. 137.

⁸²¹ The text of the chrysobull which Alexius had promised the Venetians in 1081 exists only in incomplete Latin versions contained in later documents and in a Greek resume by Anna Comnena, see: *Alexiad*, VI. v, pp. 285-7, Sewter, p. 191; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 59-63; A.R. Gadolin, "Alexius I Comnenus and the Venetian trade privileges. A new interpretation", *Byzantion*, 50 (1980), 439-46.

to Nicephoros Botaneiates. It occupied most part of Bithynia, large parts of Phrygia, Galatia and the Aegean coasts as far south as Phocaea, with its capital being at Nicaea – just 40 kilometres from Constantinople.⁸²² Alexius applied guerrilla tactics to repel the invading Seljuc detachments from the Asiatic suburbs of Constantinople, tactics which had been advised by Nicephoros Phocas and Leo VI in the previous centuries and which Alexius, as a life-long officer must have been aware of.⁸²³ These repeated raids seemed to have brought some results, with the Seljucs gradually retreating from the regions of Bithynia and Phrygia. Anna tells us that after the Byzantine victories the Sultan sought for peace,⁸²⁴ but probably Alexius realising that his eastern borders were temporarily secured he pledged for a period of truce while also promising to employ large numbers of Seljuc soldiers. Alexius did ask for troops from the Sultan in the summer of 1081, but it is uncertain whether he received a favourable answer or not.⁸²⁵ It was much later during the siege of Larissa in the winter of 1082/3 that Alexius again urgently requested reinforcements from Sulleyman I and thus received 7,000 men.⁸²⁶

Alexius was working in another direction as well, trying to stir up a rebellious mood in Guiscard's rear. William of Apulia mentions Abelard, Guiscard's rebellious nephew and one of the ringleaders of many of the previous insurrections in Apulia, including the one in 1078/9, who had taken refuge in Constantinople.⁸²⁷ Alexius was able to use him as an emissary to send letters to Herman, Abelard's half-brother and lord of Cannae, to Archbishop Hérve of Capua and, of course, to Gregory VII.⁸²⁸ Alexius also sent letters to Henry IV, whose relations with Rome had severely worsened, especially after the meeting at Canosa in

⁸²² For more on Qutlumus' state, see: Korobeinikov, "The Turks (1040-1304)", 706-10.

⁸²³ *Alexiad*, III. xi, p. 179; Sewter, p. 129.

⁸²⁴ *Ibid.*, III. xi, p. 181; Sewter, p. 130.

⁸²⁵ *Alexiad*, IV. ii, p. 191; Sewter, p. 137.

⁸²⁶ *Ibid.*, V. v, p. 244; Sewter, p. 167; Chalandon erroneously reports that the unit of 7,000 men were sent for the 1081 campaign, see: Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. 74.

⁸²⁷ *Gesta*, III. 659-67, p. 200.

⁸²⁸ *Alexiad*, III. x, pp. 173, 176-77; Sewter, pp. 126-27.

June 1080 when he was excommunicated for the second time by Gregory and Robert Guiscard became Rome's vassal, thus breaking a century's long tradition where Italian lords were appointed to their lordships by the German Emperors.

To assess the Empire's resources in able-bodied men and what the government in Constantinople could actually put in the field, we have to examine the last major battle fought by the Byzantine forces, the civil conflict of Kalavrye (March 1078). The two parties that fought against each other on the outskirts of Adrianople represented the two different worlds of the Byzantine Empire – the experienced governor of Dyrrachium and one of the best officers the Empire had in the West, Nicephoros Bryennius, and the aged Emperor himself, a former governor of the thema of Anatolikon who was represented in the battlefield by Alexius Comnenus. Bryennius was able to collect troops from Macedonia, Thessaly and Thrace, probably around 8,000 strong, while as governor of Dyrrachium he had managed to reinforce his army with Norman (the *Maniacatoi*) and Patzinak mercenaries, again around 8,000 strong. Alexius, on the other hand, had a force of about 13,000 men consisting of 2,000 Turkish troops, provided by Sulleyman I, a few hundred mounted Franks and the cavalry tagma of the Immortals numbering around 1,000, and the indigenous troops from Choma⁸²⁹, probably around 2,000 men strong or even less.

Since the establishment of the Sultanate of Rum by Sulleyman I, we have little doubt that looking for indigenous troops in Asia Minor would have been fruitless. The decline of the Empire in Asia Minor can be clearly seen by Anna's mentioning of the *toparchs* (town governors) which were summoned by Alexius to send all the forces they could spare to the capital. Anna only talks about the governor of Pontic Heraclea and Paphlagonia, of "Cappadocia and Choma" and "of other officers" probably from the north-western regions of the old Opsician and Thracesian themes.⁸³⁰ Anna adds to this: "Turkish infiltration had scattered the eastern armies in all directions and the Turks were in almost complete control of

⁸²⁹ Fortress of Phrygia in the upper Meander valley that became important as a frontier post in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, p. 426.

⁸³⁰ *Alexiad*, III. ix, pp. 169-71; Sewter, p. 125.

all the districts between the Black Sea and Hellespont, the Syrian and Aegean waters.”⁸³¹
Further indication of the degree of Turkish infiltration in Asia Minor can be seen by the place names of Turkish-Oguz origin found predominantly in the transitional lands of Paphlagonia, Phrygia and Lycia.⁸³²

In about mid-August Alexius set out from the capital heading for Dyrrachium. He had with him 300 men from Choma and a contingent of Varangian Guards under their leader Nampites,⁸³³ and although we cannot be certain of its numerical strength it has been estimated to be around 1.500-2.000 strong,⁸³⁴ bearing in mind that some units would certainly have stayed back in the capital and in other garrison towns in the Balkans (i.e. we find 300 Varangians at Kastoria in 1082). With Alexius in the capital and his Domestic of the West Gregorius Pakourianus⁸³⁵ at Adrianople, the armed units that the two of them managed to gather consisted of the tagma of the *Excubitae*, led by Constantine Opus,⁸³⁶ units from Macedonia and Thrace under Antiochus and Thessaly under Alexander Cabasilas. These Balkan units are unlikely to have been greatly affected by the Patzinak raids of the last decades, thus it is perhaps safe to assume that they would have been around 5,000 strong. These units consisted of veterans and large numbers of new recruits, judging by Anna

⁸³¹ Ibid., I. iv, p. 25; Sewter, p. 38.

⁸³² We have the survival of the toponyms *yayla* and *kisla* and their derivatives in many areas of the aforementioned former Byzantine themes. See: Roche, “In the Wake of Matzikert”, 142.

⁸³³ For Nampites, see: Blondal, “Nabites”, 145-167; *The Varangians of Byzantium*, pp. 123-7, 184-5, 216.

⁸³⁴ Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, p. 134.

⁸³⁵ He held the title of *doux*, while his support of the Comneni rebellion earned him the office of Domesticus of the West. See: *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. III, p. 1553.

⁸³⁶ For Constantine Opus, see: A. Savvides, “Περί του Βυζαντινού οίκου των Ωπών στον 11^ο αιώνα”, *Byzantina*, 17 (1994), 323-28.

Comnena's description of their march from Adrianople to Thessaloniki.⁸³⁷ Strangely enough we do not find units from the province of Hellas or Peloponnesus, probably because they could not have been summoned on time for the campaign. Further, there were the units of the *vestiaritae*, the Emperor's household, and the "Franks", mercenaries serving under the Emperors' banner since the *Maniacatoi* of the early 1040s, which were led by Panoukomites and Humbertopoulos.⁸³⁸ The Emperor also had a corps of 2,000 Turcoples from the northern Macedonian region of Achrida⁸³⁹ under Taticius⁸⁴⁰ and a force of heretic Manichaeans⁸⁴¹ from Philippoupolis, some 2,800 strong under Xantas and Kouleon.⁸⁴² In addition, according

⁸³⁷ *Alexiad*, IV. iv, pp. 198-9; Sewter, p. 141; this is the second stage of the training of the Imperial soldiers, as described by: "Praecepta Militaria", I. 3-7, p. 12; see also: McGeer, 217-8.

⁸³⁸ *Alexiad*, IV. iv, pp. 198-9; Sewter, p. 141.

⁸³⁹ Savvides believes it is not the Macedonian city of Achrida but rather Achrida in the central Thracian region of Rodope. These populations were either converts to Christianity or the children of Christian-Turkish marriages, installed in a Balkan region of the Empire following the long-established tactic which had been applied recently for the Patzinaks in northern Macedonia. See: Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica*, pp. 51-2; J. Richard, "Les Turcoples: Musulmans convertes ou Chretiens Orientaux?", *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 54 (1986), 259-70.

⁸⁴⁰ A. Savvides, "Taticius the Turcople", *Journal of Oriental and African Studies*, 3-4 (1991-2), 235-38.

⁸⁴¹ The Manichaeism/Bogomilism first appeared in the Slavic populations of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Thrace in the first decades of the tenth century, before spreading throughout Bulgaria to Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia and even northern Italy and southern France. Manichaeans had been settled around Philippoupolis by John I Tzimiskes. See: A. Christophilopoulou, *Byzantine History*, Vania, Thessaloniki, 1997, pp. 95-7; M. Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 468-504; Fine, *The Early Medieval Balkans*, pp. 171-9; *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. I, p. 301.

⁸⁴² *Alexiad*, IV. iv, pp. 198-9; Sewter, p. 141.

to an Armenian source, there was a contingent of an unknown number of Armenians under a certain Prince Ochin.⁸⁴³

Alexius also called for his Imperial ally and vassal the Serbian Prince (*zupan*) Constantine-Bodin of Dioclea (Zeta).⁸⁴⁴ The relations of this Slavic principality with Byzantium date back to the mid-1040s when Michael son of Vojislav gradually emerged as the sole ruler of the principality of Dioclea (a term that will be replaced by *Montenegro* in the fifteenth century) over his four brothers (1043-46), and to secure his dominions from the Byzantine offensives he signed a treaty of peace and alliance. Michael ruled Dioclea from 1046 until 1081, when we find the last mentioning of him in the primary sources, but as I am about to explain, his feelings towards the Empire were not always cordial. In the early winter of 1072, for example, he sent an army under his son Bodin to support a Bulgarian rebellion in the vicinity of Skopje which was timed to take advantage of the internal strifes in the Empire after the defeat at Matzikert the year before.⁸⁴⁵ In fact, Bodin was captured after his army was defeated and he spent the next five years as a prisoner of Michael VI Doucas in Constantinople. This Serbian involvement in the politics of the Empire in the Balkans might seem insignificant at first glance, but as I am about to point out it bears much greater implications that involved a third party as well – the Normans of southern Italy. As J. Fine has suggested, Michael of Dioclea sent his son Bodin to Skopje in 1072 in an attempt to move further away from the Byzantine sphere of influence, towards the Pope of Rome from whom Michael received his crown as papal vassal in 1077.⁸⁴⁶ This diplomatic move makes us think that Michael would have hoped that the Pope would act in his favour and deter any expansionist attempts by the Normans against his principality, if we bear in mind Amicus II's

⁸⁴³ I am not aware of any recent edition of this Armenian source which is given by Chalandon in his *Alexis Ier* in p. 77: Tchamtchiam, *Histoire d'Arménie*, Venice, 1784-86, 2 vols., III, 10.

⁸⁴⁴ *Alexiad*, IV. v, p. 204; Sewter, p. 144.

⁸⁴⁵ For this rebellion and its significance for the political *status-quo* of the region, see: Fine, *Early Medieval Balkans*, pp. 213-15; J. Ferluga, "Les Insurrections des Slaves de la Macedoine au XIe Siècle", *Byzantium on the Balkans*, pp. 393-97.

⁸⁴⁶ Fine, *Early Medieval Balkans*, p. 214.

campaign against Byzantine Dalmatia only three years before. Another point that further complicated the Byzantino-Serbian relations was Michael's wish to create his own church (archbishopric) that would have been independent from the Greek-Orthodox archbishops of Dyrrachium and Ohrid. Again, all these facts might seem irrelevant to the Norman military operations in the Balkans, but I will come back to examine the Serbian role in the events of 1081 in the following sections of my thesis.

Now let me return to the main theme of this chapter, the Norman invasion of Illyria. After spending about a week at Glabinitza, resting his demoralised troops from the storm, we find Robert Guiscard outside the fortifications of Dyrrachium on the 17th June,⁸⁴⁷ setting up his camp in the "ruins of the city formerly called Epidamnus",⁸⁴⁸ probably the ruins of the city of Dyrrachium that was devastated by the catastrophic earthquake of the second half of the fifth century. The city was very well-defended, built on a long and narrow peninsula which ran parallel with the coast but with a marshy and swampy lagoon separating it from the mainland. There were also two fortified outposts situated on the opposite mainland area and some "four stadia" from it, both of them centred around two churches, the one dedicated to St-Nicholas where we will see Alexius observing the enemy camp and the battlefield and the other to Archangel Michael where the Varangians will seek refuge after their retreat from the battle.

Very little is known about the eleventh century fortifications of the city, mostly because little survives intact due to later use during the late Byzantine and Ottoman period, and even less is provided by our contemporary chroniclers.⁸⁴⁹ According to recent excavations which have uncovered a part of the north-eastern fortifications, the city was surrounded by a rectangular curtain wall which was supported by semi-circular stone towers with irregular

⁸⁴⁷ *Alexiad*, IV. i, p. 187; Sewter, p. 135.

⁸⁴⁸ *Alexiad*, III. xii, p. 185; Sewter, p. 133; *Gesta*, IV. 241-243, p. 216; the city's ancient Greek name, Epidamnus (*Επίδαμνος*), was changed to Dyrrachium when the city fell to the Romans in 229 BC.

⁸⁴⁹ Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 208-13; A. Bon, "Fortresses medievales de la Grece Centrale", *Bulletin de Correspondance Hellenique*, 61 (1937), 136-208; idem, *La Moree Franque*, Paris, 1969.

double brick bands and occasional vertical brickwork, a typical style of Byzantine military architecture of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.⁸⁵⁰ Three of these circular towers have been excavated so far, thus marking the eastern corner of the city's citadel, while other polygonal ones built in the north side represent the twelfth century fortifications.⁸⁵¹ In addition to the archaeological evidence, our idea of Dyrrachium's eleventh century fortifications is further enhanced by Anna Comnena's brief mentioning of the city's walls. We read in the thirteenth book of the *Alexiad* which covers Bohemond's campaign in 1107, "its wall is interrupted by towers which all round the city rise to a height of eleven feet above it (the wall). A spiral staircase leads to the top of the towers and they are strengthened by battlements. So much for the city's defensive plan. The walls are of considerable thickness, so wide indeed that more than four horsemen can ride abreast in safety."⁸⁵²

The Normans pressed on with the siege from all accessible sides, meaning both from the north and east.⁸⁵³ Siege machines were built, namely helepoleis⁸⁵⁴ and other enormous wooden siege-towers which made an impression on the besieged population.⁸⁵⁵ However, according to Anna these had a poor impact on the city's defences and on the morale of the soldiers who made repeated sorties to burn down these machines.⁸⁵⁶ A more detailed analysis of these siege-engines, along with their use in this period by the Normans and other Crusader

⁸⁵⁰ Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, p. 209; *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, p. 30.

⁸⁵¹ For the medieval fortifications of Dyrrachium, see: Stephenson, *Byzantium's Balkan Frontier*, p. 161; Stephenson's main source is an Albanian monograph: G. Karaiskaj, "Kalaja Durrësit ne mesjete", *Monumentet*, 13 (1977), 29-53; see also: Ducellier, "'Dernieres decouvertes", p. 45; for general works on the Byzantine fortifications, see: C. Foss, D. Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications: an Introduction*, Pretoria, 1986; *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, pp. 20-43; Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 208-13.

⁸⁵² *Alexiad*, XIII. iii, vol. II, p. 190; Sewter, p. 403; compare with: "On Strategy", 12. 1-56, pp. 34-6.

⁸⁵³ *Gesta*, IV. 213, p. 216; Malaterra, 3. 25.

⁸⁵⁴ A helepoleis was a multi-storey wooden siege tower on wheels or rollers, fitted with stone throwing catapults and drawbridges. It was protected from fire by layers of hides.

⁸⁵⁵ *Alexiad*, IV. i, pp. 188-9; Sewter, p. 135; *Gesta*, IV. 250-1, p. 218.

⁸⁵⁶ *Alexiad*, IV. ii, p. 194; Sewter, pp. 137-9.

armies, can be found in the following chapter which examines Bohemond's Illyrian campaign of 1107-8, due to the more detailed description given to us by Anna Comnena. And while the siege lingered on, the Venetian squadron⁸⁵⁷ arrived in the Illyrian waters, sometime in late July or early August.⁸⁵⁸

The accounts of the ensuing naval battle between the Venetian and Norman fleets are rather contradictory. According to the *Alexiad*,⁸⁵⁹ the Venetian fleet arrived at the promontory of Pallia, further to the north of the besieged city at some "eighteen stades from Robert's camp", but they refused battle on the first day. And while they prepared the fleet during the night for the next day's naval confrontation, having wooden towers erected on the main mast and manned with experienced men, there was a fierce battle between the two fleets. But the Normans were unable to break the solid Venetian "sea-harbour" (*πελαγολιμένα*), meaning the defensive formation where the biggest and strongest vessels were tied tightly together forming a closing crescent, thus sheltering the smaller and more vulnerable vessels inside their formation. The Venetians eventually managed to route the enemy fleet, which landed inshore and suffered a second major defeat by a sortie party led by Paleologos.

Malaterra had a rather different story to tell, presenting the Venetians as a cunning and crafty enemy.⁸⁶⁰ The Normans immediately attacked the Venetians once they realised their arrival in Illyrian waters, and after a most violent naval battle, by sunset the Normans seemed to have won the day. The Venetians, promising to surrender the next day asked for a truce, but during that night they erected wooden towers in the ships' main masts and made their vessels

⁸⁵⁷ I have found nowhere any numbers for this unit. Nicol gives a number of fourteen warships and forty-five other vessels but he neglects to give his source, see: Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 57.

⁸⁵⁸ Since both Lupus Protospatharius and the *Anonymous Barenses Chronicon* put the arrival of the fleet in the end of their year 1081, knowing that the new year started on the 1st September on their accounts like Anna Comnena's indiction. See: Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1081; *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1081.

⁸⁵⁹ *Alexiad*, IV. ii, pp. 192-4; Sewter, pp. 137-9.

⁸⁶⁰ Malaterra, 3. 26; Dandolo, *Chronicon*, s.a. 1081, p. 216.

lighter and, thus, more manoeuvrable. By sunrise, the re-organised Venetian squadron attacked the unprepared Normans, forcing them to retreat while they were breaking the naval blockade imposed to the city. After consulting with the inhabitants of Dyrrachium and making further preparations they attacked the Normans again early the next day, making effective use of the Greek fire.

The main offensive weapons aboard a warship in the early period of the Crusades were bows and javelins, though crossbows were already being used by the Muslim navies. It was only in the thirteenth century, though, that the crossbow had become by far the most important naval weapon on board Italian ships, thus we see small but elite units of crossbowmen dominating the ships of the period.⁸⁶¹ Because a naval battle, most of the time, was limited to exchanging volleys of arrows from the enemy ships, the rival fleets included certain superstructures in the form of wooden towers or “castles” at the ship’s stern and sometimes prow.⁸⁶² According to Malaterra, the Venetians busied themselves in erecting these wooden superstructures to provide better cover for their bowmen in the following day. These wooden superstructures could also be used against coastal defences, but they very rarely had any success.⁸⁶³ Whether the Norman navy used any of these erections against Corfu in the spring of 1081, is unknown but since nothing is reported by our chroniclers we cautiously presume that this technique was still not used by the Norman navy.

After this serious setback in Guiscard’s siege of the city, which probably cost him the tribute paid by the people of Corfu (although the citadel remained in Norman hands until the Easter of 1084),⁸⁶⁴ and with his communications and supply routes with the Italian mainland

⁸⁶¹ Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 142-6; compare with the English navy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: Prestwich, *Armies and Warfare in the Middle Ages*, pp. 276-80.

⁸⁶² Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, p. 148.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 150; Bennett, “Amphibious Operations”, 57.

⁸⁶⁴ *Gesta*, IV. 313-316, p. 220.

completely cut off by the patrolling squadrons of the joint Venetian and Byzantine fleets,⁸⁶⁵ the Norman army was about to suffer from another much more serious misfortune. Their naval defeat, the harassment by the Venetian-Byzantine naval squadrons and the Dyrrachium garrison, the lack of supplies from Apulia, the humid environment of coastal Illyria along with the insalubrious conditions in a medieval camp had already spread starvation and disease, thus making the need to move the camp to another place quite pressing. Robert Guiscard took his forces further south to the estuary of the river Glykys (*Acheron*) and remained there for about two months.⁸⁶⁶

We find Alexius in Thessaloniki sometime probably in early September. Following the Via Egnatia he arrived at Dyrrachium on the 15th October, pitching camp on the banks of the river Charzanes.⁸⁶⁷ The place where he chose to camp was on the opposite side of the lagoon which separated the Dyrrachian peninsula from the mainland, thus having a natural obstacle between his army and the Norman camp. Before his arrival, however, the Emperor had already sent Basil Mesardonites with the 2,000 Turkopole mercenaries, elite cavalry archers, in a reconnaissance mission of Robert Guiscard's camp. But this unit was involved in a battle and completely defeated by the Normans.⁸⁶⁸

Before the battle we have a unique opportunity to take ourselves to Alexius' war council and we see George Paleologos being hastily summoned from the besieged city. According to Anna Comnena, we have two conflicting views of what tactics should have been applied

⁸⁶⁵ Sometime in late summer a Byzantine squadron of an unknown size arrived to reinforce the Venetians. See: *Alexiad*, IV. iii, p. 195; Sewter, p. 139; Anna makes us think that the Byzantine squadron was not present in the area before August and it simply arrived as reinforcements. However, it seems to me more likely that the Byzantines were simply avoiding battle due to their small numbers. Their leader was Mavrikas, leader of the Byzantine fleet that had beaten the Normans off Brindisi in 1070.

⁸⁶⁶ *Alexiad*, IV. iii, pp. 196-7; Sewter, pp. 139-40.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, IV. v, p. 203; Sewter, p. 143.

⁸⁶⁸ This event is described only by William of Apulia, see: *Gesta*, IV. 324-343, p. 222; Orderic Vitalis also gives an account of a small-scale battle which preceded the main battle outside Dyrrachium: Orderic Vitalis, VII, p. 18.

against the Norman siege of Dyrrachium. The more experienced officers of the army, with Paleologos at their head, insisted that no immediate action should be taken against the invaders, thus urging for a blockade of the Norman camp and continuous skirmishing that would reduce the enemy's numbers and morale.⁸⁶⁹ This plan was quite sensible coming from a very experienced and reliable officer, summarizing everything that Leo VI, Nicephoros Phocas and Vegetius dictated about getting to know your enemy, the terrain and avoiding battle unless all the chances are at your side. It is very doubtful that the Byzantines had sufficient and accurate intelligence concerning the numbers and consistency of the Norman army, even after being in close proximity for so long, nor about the geography of the area,⁸⁷⁰ while the fact that one of their elite units had already been heavily defeated should have dictated caution and prudence.

Alexius, however, followed the younger and hot-headed officers of his army who were calling for an immediate battle to be given, probably raising issues of pride and honour against a "barbarian" Duke who dared to provoke the mighty Byzantine Empire, thus leaving little room for the recently crowned Emperor to manoeuvre. These officers were Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the son of the former emperor Constantine X Doukas (1059-67) and brother of Michael VII (1071-78), Nampites the leader of the Varangian Guard, Nicephoros Synadenus and the sons of the former emperor Romanus IV, Leo and Nicephoros. It is quite possible that Constantine, whom Anna makes look like the leader of the "opposition" against Paleologos' plans for a blockade, might have been hoping for a defeat of the Byzantine arms, something that would have enabled him to raise claims to the throne as a descendant of the Doukades and younger brother of the deposed Michael VII. It was his elder brother Andronicus Doukas who had betrayed Romanus IV at Matzikert ten years earlier. On the 17th October, when it probably became evident to the Normans that the Byzantine Army was

⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., IV. v, p. 204; Sewter, pp. 143-4.

⁸⁷⁰ A striking contrast to Alexius' campaign against Bohemond at Larisa two years later, when he specifically asked for information about the topography of the region from a local.

preparing to launch an attack, Robert Guiscard ordered his ships to be burned,⁸⁷¹ in a desperate attempt to boost the morale of his soldiers and encourage them to fight to the end.⁸⁷² However, whether it was really his entire fleet that Guiscard ordered to be burned or just the landing crafts that had transported the Norman forces from the ships it depends on how we interpret our chroniclers' writings.

The Emperor's initial plan, according to the *Alexiad*,⁸⁷³ was not to engage the Normans in a pitched battle but rather to perform a surprise night-attack on the Norman camp from two sides, sending his "allies" – the Serbs and the Turks – on the longer route through the marshes towards Robert's rear, while he would have pressed for a frontal attack-raid, most likely with a coordinated attack-sortie by the Dyrrachian garrison as well. However, during the night of the 17th/18th October the Normans had already moved out of their camp opposite Dyrrachium to the sanctuary of St-Theodorus, a place much closer to the Byzantine camp on the opposite side of the Dyrrachian lagoon, with all their forces ready for battle. Whether it was simply a coincidence or the Byzantine plan had somehow reached Guiscard's ears we will never know for sure, but next morning the Normans had placed themselves between the lagoon and Alexius' army, having the lagoon on their rear and the sea on the right.

Although Alexius had already sent some units, probably light cavalry, to attack Guiscard's camp from the north through the marshes, seeing the Normans in battle array on the morning of the 18th October he re-adjusted his plans to face them in a pitched battle that same day. The Normans had arranged their battle lines as follows⁸⁷⁴: Robert Guiscard, as the natural leader of that campaign, commanded the main force at the centre of the formation; his son

⁸⁷¹ *Alexiad*, IV. vi, p. 214; Sewter, p. 145; Malaterra, 3. 27.

⁸⁷² We read in Vegetius: "Most people ignorant of military matters believe the victory will be more complete if they surround the enemy in a confined place or with large numbers of soldiers, so they can find no way of escape. But trapped men draw extra courage from desperation, and when there is no hope, fear takes up arms." See: Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, III. 21, p. 107.

⁸⁷³ *Alexiad*, IV. vi, pp. 208-9; Sewter, pp. 145-6.

⁸⁷⁴ *Alexiad*, IV. vi, pp. 208-9; Sewter, p. 146.

Bohemond, the second-in-command, took command of the left wing, while the right wing closer to the sea was entrusted to “Amiketas” (probably Amicus II of Molfetta and Giovenazzo).⁸⁷⁵ Unfortunately we have no idea of the composition of each of the three battles of the Norman army. It is most likely though that Guiscard would have kept the bulk of his elite cavalry units in the centre of his formation, and probably behind the heavy infantry for better protection against enemy missile weapons, the deployment used by William at Hastings. In the wings he had probably put the conscript levies and the most light or inexperienced cavalry. Whether the Normans had brought any archers with them is not sure, but even if they did their presence was not felt during the battle that day.

Alexius arranged his battle lines accordingly, taking command of the centre division of the army, while Pakourianus was at the head of the left wing, closer to the sea, and the Caesar Nicephoros Melissinos being in charge of the right wing. The Varangian Guard, fighting dismounted in the Anglo-Saxon custom, was put in the centre front line of the whole formation and projected a few yards forward. Alexius, by putting the Varangians in front of the central division, would probably have wanted to take advantage of their thick infantry formations against a possible charge of the Norman heavy cavalry, while he also would have been aware of the English hatred for the Normans over the conquest of their homeland.⁸⁷⁶ In addition, units of lightly armed archers and peltasts were ordered to move through their lines release volleys of arrows before retiring, in order to weaken the enemy advanced units.⁸⁷⁷ Unfortunately, as with the Norman army, we have no idea of the consistency of each of the three divisions of the Imperial army. It would be likely that Alexius kept the units of the *Excubitae*, the *Vestiaritae* and the *Chomatianoï* with him, along with the elite cavalry troops of the Franks and, possibly, the Thessalians as well. The Macedonian and Thracian units

⁸⁷⁵ Amicus II took part in all three Apulian rebellions in 1067/8, 1072 and 1078/80. See: *Gesta*, III, 118-131, p. 170; 392, p. 184; 642, p. 198.

⁸⁷⁶ Malaterra, 3. 27.

⁸⁷⁷ The peltasts and the javeliners of the Comnenian armies would have been of Caucasian origin, probably Georgian or Abasgian: Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 196-7.

might have been kept in the same division, as had happened in Kalavrye (1078) and Matzikert (1071), while the Armenians (if indeed there were any at that campaign) would have been placed under the command of Pakourianus, himself of Armenian origin.

The first stage of the battle was opened by the Normans, with Robert Guiscard beginning his march towards the Byzantines.⁸⁷⁸ His first tactical move was to send a body of his horsemen, most likely from his own division containing the most experienced knights, to charge against the English and then pretend a disorderly retreat back to their lines in order to entice their opponents into breaking their ranks and pursue them. The Byzantine reaction to this was immediate, with the archers and the peltasts that were put behind the ranks of the Varangians marching forward to repel the Norman charge by volleys of arrows. The peltasts engaged in moderate skirmishing with the Normans and while the Byzantine centre was occupied in repelling the first attack-wave, Robert Guiscard was quickly covering the distance between the two armies. While the first attack wave must have been forced to retreat and the three Norman divisions were marching forward, Amicus' cavalry and infantry units charged forward and attacked Nampites' left flank, exactly at the point where it met with Pakourianus' division. This may be seen as an attempt to break the English ranks by attacking their exposed flanks which are every infantry unit's weak point. But the Normans were met with heavy resistance by the English while Pakourianus' units, along with certain elite units from Alexius' division, rushed forward to support them. The Normans broke into disorderly retreat, "throwing themselves into the sea up to their necks and when they were near the Roman and Venetian ships begged for their lives – but nobody rescued them".⁸⁷⁹ At this point, Anna, by far the best account we have of the battle, adds the famous story of Robert's wife Sigkelgaita who managed to bring the retreating Normans to their senses by grabbing a spear and charging at full gallop against them. If we are to believe Anna's account, the

⁸⁷⁸ The main secondary works for the battle of Dyrrachium are: Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, pp. 133-37; Birkenmeier, *The Komnenian Army*, pp. 62-70.

⁸⁷⁹ *Alexiad*, IV. vi, p. 210; Sewter, p. 147.

Norman right wing under Amicus must have consisted of conscript levies and light cavalry because of their poor morale and lack of discipline.

By the time the Norman right wing was forced to a panicky retreat by the Byzantine units, the rest of the army would have marched forward enough to be involved into skirmishing with the Byzantine divisions of Alexius and Melissinos, but no unit would make a decisive tactical move that would tip the battle in its favour. The Varangians, however, who had just repelled a joint cavalry and infantry attack, could not resist joining their comrades in the pursuit of the fleeing Normans along the coast. The consequences of this move were to prove disastrous for the Byzantine campaign, with their quick pace of marching forward resulting into them being separated from the main body of the Imperial army and, thus, making them extremely vulnerable to flanking movements by the enemy.⁸⁸⁰ Robert Guiscard was a too experienced tactician to let this opportunity pass by. He immediately ordered a unit of elite heavy infantry, probably spearmen, to fall upon them on their right flank and at a short period of time the exhausted, surprised and outnumbered Varangians had suffered heavy casualties. Due to the fact that they were not completely surrounded, a few of them managed to seek refuge to the nearby church of Archangel Michael (*Αρχιστράτηγος Μιχαήλ*)⁸⁸¹, where they were all burned to death by the Normans who set the church alight.

With the Varangian Guard completely annihilated and his left wing in a disorderly pursuit of the retreating Normans, Alexius found his main division exposed to the Norman cavalry attacks from the front and left flank. Robert Guiscard had not yet used his elite cavalry units, with the exception of the feigned retreat during the opening stages of the battle, and he saw that this was the right time to throw them against his enemy.⁸⁸² This all out attack by the Norman cavalry proved effective in shattering the Byzantine morale and discipline. Although Anna mentions that certain units did stand and fought courageously, many of their comrades abandoned the fight and ran away, with the entire front soon disintegrating rapidly. Only the

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., IV. vi, pp. 210-11; Sewter, p. 147.

⁸⁸¹ *Alexiad*, IV. vi, p. 211; Sewter, p. 148; Malaterra, 3. 27.

⁸⁸² *Alexiad*, IV. vi, p. 211; Sewter, p. 148.

Emperor and his retinue resisted as long as they could, but they too realised that any further resistance would have been pointless.

The losses for the Byzantine forces must have been heavy. It is quite possible that as much as 25% of the total Byzantine forces engaged might have been killed or wounded,⁸⁸³ if we include the entire Varangian contingent of some 2,000 men, units of the left wing that repelled Amicus' attack and units from the front ranks of the main and right divisions. The Manichaeans may have suffered some 300 casualties, since Anna give us a number of 2,500 of them being discharged by Pakourianus sometime after the battle,⁸⁸⁴ while it is certain that the Dalmatians and Turkopole troops from Achrida did not even engage the enemy. These units had just found the Norman camp abandoned and were marching towards the battlefield at the time when Guiscard was launching his first feigned cavalry attack. They had every chance to attack the Normans from the rear but, as Anna tells us, Bodin who was the leader of the Diocleans, remained a spectator of the battle and awaited patiently for its outcome to see which side would prevail.⁸⁸⁵ The Norman casualties, on the other hand, must have been much less since the only major unit that dealt a severe blow was Amicus' division which, after launching an attack on the Varangian left flank, was repelled and routed. Even though large numbers must have been killed or drowned in their desperate attempt to evade their pursuers, this would not have constituted a serious blow to Robert Guiscard's army since, as it was mentioned above, these men would probably have been inexperienced peasant levies and lightly armed cavalry.

The battle of Dyrrachium - Conclusions

In studying the battle of Dyrrachium and the Norman battle tactics used against an army which had developed a quite different mentality and concepts about warfare throughout, at

⁸⁸³ Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars*, p. 137.

⁸⁸⁴ *Alexiad*, V. iii, p. 232; Sewter, p. 160.

⁸⁸⁵ *Alexiad*, IV. vi, p. 214; Sewter, p. 149.

least, the previous five centuries, a comparison between the tactics used by Robert Guiscard against the Byzantines and those applied in the fields of southern Italy, Sicily, Normandy and England is inevitable. If we examine the battle stage by stage, first we come across the feigned retreat that was applied by Robert Guiscard in the opening stages of the battle. But before we relate this tactic to Sicily and, to what seem much more obvious, Hastings, we have to ask ourselves, how the eleventh century Normans had learned about this battle tactic, especially since we know that they had used it at least three times before Dyrrachium, namely at Arques (1053), Messina (1060) and Hastings (1066)?⁸⁸⁶

The feigned retreat was a well applied trick which had been introduced in Europe already since the mid-fifth century by the nomadic tribes of the Huns. Although contacts did exist between the Magyars, who also fought in a similar way as the steppe nomads,⁸⁸⁷ and the Eastern Franks, we cannot be sure whether there was any transmission of the experience gained in the region of Carinthia, Moravia and the middle Danube to mainland Francia. The answer is suggested in a series of articles by Professor Bachrach who argues that the Alans, another steppe people, had been settled by the Romans in Armorica, the name given in ancient times to the part of Gaul that includes the Brittany peninsula and the territory between the Seine and Loire rivers, and their influence on Armorican cavalry tactics are dated from

⁸⁸⁶ The debate on whether there was indeed a feigned retreat of William's cavalry on the second stage of the battle has been fought as hard as the two enemy armies at Hastings, and we need not engage this issue more. I find the arguments of Oman, Brown, Verbruggen, Douglas and Bachrach more convincing than those of Beeler, Lemmon and Delbruck suggesting a "cover-up" of a true retreat by the contemporary chroniclers. For more on Hastings feigned retreat and battle tactics see: Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 149-166; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 96; R. A. Brown, "The Battle of Hastings", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 3 (1980), 1-21; B. S. Bachrach, "The Feigned Retreat at Hastings", *Medieval Studies*, 33 (1971), 344-7; Douglas, *William the Conqueror*, pp. 203-4; C.H. Lemmon, *The Field of Hastings*, St-Leonards-on-Sea, 1956; Beeler, *Warfare in England*, pp. 21-22; Delbruck, *Medieval Warfare*, vol. III, pp. 158-9.

⁸⁸⁷ For the Magyar battle tactics and an analysis of the Battle of Lechfeld, see: Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 116-25; Delbruck, *Medieval Warfare*, vol. III, pp. 115-29; Contamine, *War in the Middle Ages*, p. 35.

the fifth century.⁸⁸⁸ Count Alan of Brittany was in command of the routed left wing of the Bretons and Angevins at Hastings, while Walter Giffard, a commander at Arques, was also present there.⁸⁸⁹ Since we have already established the steady flow of immigrants from “beyond the Alps” to southern Italy after the second quarter of the eleventh century, then it should come as no surprise the use of feigned retreat at Dyrrachium in 1081.

Another theory wants the feigned retreat to have its roots on mock battles which were being reported throughout France and Flandres at least as early as the Carolingian period.⁸⁹⁰ In fact, we read about a specific type of exercise taking place at Worms, on 14th February 842, between followers of Louis the German and Charles II the Bald. Saxon, Gascon, Austrasian and Breton cavalymen would ride in teams against each other at full gallop but at the moment before impact one party would make a turn and pretend to escape while the other would play the role of the pursuers, and vice-versa, all under the cheering of the crowd gathered to watch.⁸⁹¹ Einhard also refers to numerous military exercises undertaken by Charlemagne’s sons “as his ancestors had done, as no one matches the Franks in these arts.”⁸⁹² Could military training and the simulation of pitched battles in France have led to the development of this feigned retreat tactic? We cannot be certain but we can at least consider it as possible.⁸⁹³

Thus the battle of Dyrrachium opened with Robert Guiscard sending a cavalry detachment, probably of his elite and experienced knights he kept in his division, to try and

⁸⁸⁸ Bachrach, “The Feigned Retreat at Hastings”, 344-7; idem, “The Alans in Gaul”, *Traditio*, 23 (1967), 480-2, 484-9; idem, “The Origin of Armorican Chivalry”, *Technology and Culture*, 10 (1969), 166-71.

⁸⁸⁹ *William of Poitiers*, p. 134.

⁸⁹⁰ Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, p. 30.

⁸⁹¹ Nithard, *Histoire des Fils de Louis le Pieux*, ed. and tr. Ph. Lauer, H. Champion, Paris, 1926, III. 6, pp. 110-112.

⁸⁹² Einhard, *Vita et Gesta Karoli Magni [Vie de Charlemagne]*, ed. and tr. L. Halphen, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1967 (4th ed.), 19, p. 58; 22, p. 68.

⁸⁹³ B.S. Bachrach, *Early Carolingian warfare: prelude to empire*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2001.

dislodge the defensive formation that dominated the centre of the enemy lines. Fortunately for the Varangians, however, Alexius had put archers and peltasts immediately behind them, in the space between the Varangians' and Alexius' division, with orders to march through the Varangian lines and repel or slow down an enemy advance. Like in Hastings, when the infantry and cavalry charges of William's army were met with a heavy shower of arrows, javelins, lances and other "primitive casting weapons", this cavalry attack produced poor results with the Varangians staying put and their defensive formation unshaken.

The second stage of the battle, however, proved to be the most crucial one. While the Norman cavalry detachment was engaged in a moderate skirmishing with the Varangians and the supporting peltasts, the Norman army had managed to cover most of the distance between them and the Byzantines and, at that important point of the battle, Amicus' division, probably consisting of infantry levies and light cavalry, launched an attack which was directed at the Varangians' left flank. Although the latter must have still been supported by the peltasts, their flanks were exposed to enemy attack since they were deployed in some distance in front of the rest of the Imperial Army. The Varangians resisted stoutly without giving any ground to the Normans, receiving reinforcements by the Byzantine left wing and centre which resulted in the attackers being routed. And it was at that point that disaster struck for Alexius' army.

With their right wing in a disorderly retreat, thus leaving the main division exposed to flanking enemy movements this would have seemed like a perfect opportunity for Alexius to strike a serious blow on Robert Guiscard's army and perhaps even win the field. But as it had happened at Hastings, where after the first infantry and cavalry charge Harold's men from his right wing broke ranks in order to pursue their enemies downhill and they were cut to pieces, the same fate followed Nampites' men in Dyrrachium. Due to "their inexperience and hot temper" they broke their dense defensive formation and were carried away in a foot pursuit of the retreating Norman right wing. And it does seem frustrating why this division abandoned their phalanx formation – the tightly packed body of infantry that was trained to move out as a unit on command – which gave them such a great advantage over the Norman heavy cavalry. Being separated by the main body of the Imperial Army and out of breath they

constituted an easy target for Guiscard who immediately ordered his elite infantry to fall upon them. The result was a massacre that not only completely annihilated the Imperial Army's most elite unit in the field but left its main body exposed to the Norman heavy cavalry attack.

In total contrast to this traditional idea of the Varangian hot-headed pursuit of the Norman right wing that resulted to them being separated from the rest of the army, we have to consider another version of the events. It is possible that the Emperor, seeing his enemy's right wing in disorderly retreat and thus realising Guiscard's vulnerability on his right flank, would have signalled a general advance. But with the centre and right divisions of the Byzantines already involved in a moderate skirmish and the Varangians advancing well beyond the Byzantine line, the cardinal sin must have been Alexius' failure to catch up and support their advance. It is quite unlikely that this version would have been presented to us by Anna, but although it is not even mentioned by Malaterra or William of Apulia, at least we have to consider it as possible.

The retreat and subsequent annihilation of the Varangian infantry units brings out an issue that has been mentioned while studying the battle at Civitate.⁸⁹⁴ The most basic point that we can deduct from the studying of battles like Civitate, Hastings and Dyrrachium is that heavy cavalry units could make no impression upon well-equipped and disciplined footsoldiers who kept their formation unbroken. And that stems from the basic logic that no horse would attempt to throw itself against a "wall of shields", as the dense infantry formations would resemble from a distance. The only chance for horsemen to break through the enemy's formation and engage into a *mêlée* was to thin down the front ranks of the enemy, and this inevitably required the presence of archers to shoot volleys of arrows – preferably concentrated on a specific part of the enemy's formation in order to create a gap. That brought the desirable results for Edward I at Falkirk, in 1298, considering the fact that the Scots had lost the support of their cavalry that could have neutralised Edward's archers early

⁸⁹⁴ Gillingham, "An Age of Expansion", *Medieval Warfare*, 64, 76-8; Bennett, "The Myth of the Military Supremacy of Knightly Cavalry", 304-16, especially pp. 310-16; Morillo, "The "Age of Cavalry" Revisited", 45-58; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 46-49.

in the battle. A unit of well-equipped and disciplined footsoldiers, on the other hand, was clearly a defensive formation which, like the Varangian Guard or the previously mentioned Scottish schiltrons, had to be sufficiently deep and dense and needed the support of units of cavalry and archers because, although it could repel the cavalry charges, its speed and ability for manoeuvres made any counterattack almost unthinkable. And in the cases when the footsoldiers did break ranks and charged against their enemies, like Hastings and Dyrrachium, they got slaughtered. At Civitate though, the Swabian infantry took full advantage of their only weapon in the battlefield, their disciplined and tight formations, and resisted stoutly against the repeated charges of the Norman cavalry, but being surrounded and heavily outnumbered they stood no chance. Throughout history, the armies that effectively combine both arms – infantry and cavalry – were the most successful.

To return to our analysis of the battle of Dyrrachium, the reasons behind the retreat of the main units of the Imperial army, many of them veterans with long experience of fighting in the Balkans and Asia Minor, are not given by Anna and speculations around this subject can be risky. One possible reason can be the fact that the “heavy” cavalry of the late eleventh century Byzantine Army was of no match to the cavalry charge of the Norman chivalry due to its equipment and training as I have explained in a previous chapter. If we combine this with the fact that Alexius had to call up for recruits with no previous military experience, as we have already seen, we understand why, although Alexius had the numerical superiority over his enemy, numbers do not necessarily bring victory on the battlefield. Alexius could have been counting on the dense phalanx formations of his Varangians to repel any Norman cavalry charge, while he would launch an all out cavalry attack on the weaker Norman flanks. But when his “protective shield” was annihilated, the Normans had all the room to take full advantage of their tactic that had practically given them the victory in so many battlefields thus far, a heavy cavalry attack by the Norman knights.

Since my aim is not to speculate on what would have happened if Alexius had used the Varangians as, for example, a reserve unit behind the cavalry, we can conclude that the Byzantine Emperor, although a life-long army officer, in his early thirties he was facing an

enemy whose military tactics were practically unknown to him.⁸⁹⁵ Whether he had access to any military manuals like the *Tactica* or the *Praecepta Militaria*, handbooks that strictly forbade fighting a pitched battle against the “Franks”, is debatable. Undoubtedly, the greatest difference between the Byzantines and other neighbouring cultures lays in the fact that it was the former, like the Romans before them, who were writing down useful knowledge and experience their generals had gained in the battlefields, thus giving the false impression that others like the Muslims were more inexperienced or even inferior in their strategies compared to the Byzantines. As the author of the *On Skirmishing* writes, “In order that time, which leads us to forget what we once knew, might not completely blot out this useful knowledge, we think we ought to commit this to writing. He [Nicephoros Phocas] entrusted me with the task of describing a method as accurately as possible and handing it on to those who would come after us.”⁸⁹⁶ And a number of manuals would have been available to the young nobles of the Constantinopolitan Court or the officers of the provincial armies whose fundamental occupation would have been the studying of classical Greek, Roman and contemporary books that were referring to war.

A recent study has concluded, after examining a number of Byzantine chronicler accounts of battles and military campaigns and comparing them to the military manuals of the period that the military leaders were aware of the existing military manuals and frequently consulted them.⁸⁹⁷ Indeed, the most famous reference to the use of military manuals comes from the reign of Constantine Porphyrogenitus (913-59) when among the books that the Emperor had to have those which examine the art of war (*βιβλία στρατηγικά*) and siege (*βιβλία μηχανικά*).⁸⁹⁸ Cecaumenos notes in his late eleventh century *Στρατηγικόν* that “when you [the

⁸⁹⁵ We can hardly call his “arrest” of Roussel of Bailleuil an experience on Frankish battle-tactics.

⁸⁹⁶ “On Skirmishing”, p. 146-8.

⁸⁹⁷ T. G. Kollias, “Η Πολεμική Τακτική των Βυζαντινών: Θεωρία και Πράξη”, *Byzantium at War (9th-12th c.)*, 158-9; see also: Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 200-1.

⁸⁹⁸ Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Three Treatises on Imperial Military Expeditions*, *Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae*, vol. 28, ed. J.F. Haldon, Vienna 1990, p. 106.

officer] finish with your daily business and go home to rest, do read the military manuals (*στρατηγικὰς δουλείας*) and the histories and all the ecclesiastical books; and do not ask, how does that benefit you [to read] these dogmas and ecclesiastical books; they are overwhelmingly beneficial.”⁸⁹⁹ In the same period, Bryennius writes that a prince’s training included “how to put in order a phalanx, set a camp, put a pole into the ground and all the rest that the manuals (*τακτικά*) teach us.”⁹⁰⁰ Similarly, the author of the *On Skirmishing*, when examining the defensive measures during the siege of a town, notes that “matters such as these and other devices used in sieges, and how the people inside should fight against those outside, have been carefully and precisely explained before us by the authors of books on tactics (*τακτικά*) and strategy (*στρατηγικά*).”⁹⁰¹ This specific issue of officers consulting several military handbooks is debatable but taking into consideration all the examples that I have mentioned in this chapter and in other sections of my thesis it seems to me very likely that they did consult them. However, it is hard to imagine a Byzantine officer directing his battlefield units with a military manual in his hands and, for this point, I have to mention the view of M. Mallett on the influence of classical writers on Renaissance military affairs: “The fifteenth century captain learnt the art of war as an apprentice to an established condottiere, not from books. He may have been gratified to learn from one of his humanists in his entourage that his tactics resembled those of Caesar in Gaul, but it is unlikely that he consciously intended it to be so.”⁹⁰² Thus, the influence of classical works on Byzantine officers seems to have been mainly academic and reflected only a small – but undoubtedly very important – part of their training as commanders. Whatever the case Alexius, instead of imposing a blockade as he did against Bohemond twenty-six years later,⁹⁰³ he gave to the

⁸⁹⁹ Cecaumenos, p. 19.

⁹⁰⁰ Bryennius, p. 75.

⁹⁰¹ “On Skirmishing”, 21. 12-15, p. 224.

⁹⁰² M. Mallett, *Mercenaries and their Masters, Warfare in Renaissance Italy*, Bodley Head, London, 1974, pp. 176-77; Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, pp. 62-73, especially, pp. 62-63.

⁹⁰³ Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, III, 26, pp. 116-9.

Normans exactly what they wanted, a pitched battle and ample opportunities to use their heavy cavalry.

A final point that has to be examined is the passive role of Bodin, the leader of the Dioclean Serbs and his reluctance to reinforce the Emperor during the crucial moments that preceded the annihilation of the Varangian Guard. As I have mentioned previously in this chapter, the relations between the Serbian zupan and the Byzantines were hostile, even though the Diocleans were Imperial allies since the mid-1040s. But what would Bodin hope to get from a Norman victory at Dyrrachium in 1081? I have already highlighted the Byzantine aggressiveness in the region of the principality of Dioclea throughout the century, along with Michael's (Bodin's father) wish for an independent archbishopric, while we also should bear in mind the danger that the Normans posed to the Serbs. Was Bodin hoping for a future alliance with a Norman principality in the western Balkans, as both he and the Normans were Papal vassals, that not only would have diminished the danger posed by the Byzantine Emperors but might also have brought the Archbishopric of Dyrrachium under Serbian control? In fact, a letter to Michael by Gregory VII on the 9th January 1078 implies some sort of correspondence between the two coasts of the Adriatic regarding the bishopric of Antivari on the Adriatic coast and a request for its upgrade into an archbishopric under Rome's jurisdiction.⁹⁰⁴ But even though this is nothing more than speculations we can, at least, consider it as a possibility. Bodin would have been aware that, in case of a Norman victory, the Normans would not have attempted to proceed north towards Dalmatia – perhaps to establish an Adriatic principality – but rather to continue east to Thessaloniki and he was perfectly aware that the best route would take them through the Via Egnatia which was further south. Thus, he chose to keep his army intact in case the Byzantines would win the

⁹⁰⁴ *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 5. 12, p. 258; another great source about matters in the region of Macedonia are the letters of Theophylact, archbishop of Achrida, dating between 1088-1115: *Théophylacte d'Achrida Lettres*, translated with notes and introduction by P. Gautier, Association de Recherches Byzantines, Thessalonique, 1986. However, I did not find any mentioning of Bodin in Theophylact's letters.

battle in order to defend his country from any punitive attack, which indeed took place sometime between the years 1089-91.⁹⁰⁵

⁹⁰⁵ Fine, *Early Medieval Balkans*, p. 224.

9. The second stage of the Norman invasion. From the capture of Dyrrachium to the siege of Larisa (spring 1082 – winter 1083)

Apart from the Varangian regiment, the Byzantine nobility also suffered a severe blow with several of its members being killed during the battle of Dyrrachium. The *porphyrogenitus* Constantine Doukas, Nicephoros Paleologos, general Aspietes,⁹⁰⁶ Nicephoros Synadenus and “several other fine soldiers were killed”.⁹⁰⁷ Alexius and his personal guard avoided arrest by seeking sanctuary first at a place called *Kake Pleura*, just north of Dyrrachium, and then to the castle of Lake Achrida. After probably spending the months of November and December there, a winter period that can bring severe snowfalls in the mountainous areas of Epirus and western Macedonia, he entrusted the defence of Dyrrachium’s citadel to the Venetians – due to the blockade Paleologos could not get back into the city, thus acknowledging their important role in the defence of the city,⁹⁰⁸ while he appointed a native Illyrian-Albanian (*εξ’Αρβανών*)⁹⁰⁹ as *Komeskortes* (*Κόμης της κόρτης*),⁹¹⁰ meaning commander of the forces of the lower city.⁹¹¹ As for the rest of the castles in the Dyrrachium region, Malaterra tells us that most of them capitulated.⁹¹²

⁹⁰⁶ A. Savvides, “Notes on the Armenian-Byzantine family of Aspietes, late 11th-early 13th centuries”, *Byzantinoslavica*, 52 (1991), 70-79.

⁹⁰⁷ *Alexiad*, IV. vi, pp. 211-3; Sewter, p. 148.

⁹⁰⁸ It is also quite likely that Alexius, aware of the low morale of the Dyrrachian population, would have wanted to avoid any surrender negotiations, at least not from the defenders of the citadel.

⁹⁰⁹ A native Albanian or a Byzantine official with long commanding experience in that region: E. Vrannousi, *Κομισκόρτης ο εξ Αρβανών. Σχόλια εις χωρίον της Άννας Κομνηνής*, Ioannina, 1962; “Οι όροι Αλβανοί και Αρβανίται και η πρώτη μνεία του ομόνυμου λαού της Βαλκανικής εις τας πηγάς του 11^{ου} αιώνα”, *Σύμμεικτα*, Athens, (1970), 207-54.

⁹¹⁰ *κόρτη* meant the Emperor’s tent. The main duty of the *comes tes kortes* was the escort the Drungarie of the Watch around the camp for the night inspection. See: Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System*, p. 43.

⁹¹¹ *Alexiad*, IV. viii, p. 221; Sewter, p. 153; *Gesta*, IV. 436-448, p. 228.

⁹¹² Malaterra, 3. 27; *Gesta*, IV. 440, p. 228.

Regarding the surrender of the city of Dyrrachium we have two different accounts. According to Anna Comnena, the citizens of the city, due to their low morale and after having heard of Robert Guiscard's intention to resume the siege on the following spring, they – with the role of the Amalfitans and the Venetians in the making of the decisions being highlighted – chose to open their gates and surrender the city to the Normans to avoid any possible retaliation.⁹¹³ Both Malaterra and William of Apulia give us another version of the events. After four months of negotiations the siege of the city was at a standstill due to the winter period and a certain Domenico, a nobleman of Venetian origin to whom the defence of a principal tower was delegated, had reached an agreement with Robert Guiscard to betray the city to them in exchange for the hand of the latter's niece – the daughter of William I of Principate.⁹¹⁴ This person would probably have been the son of the former Doge of Venice Otto Orseolo (1008-26, 1030-32) who had been banished from Venice, accused of nepotism, and was received in Constantinople with great honours.⁹¹⁵ Anna Comnena may well have been less informed about the precise circumstances of the surrender, writing six decades after the events, and the two versions may simply be the same. Whatever the case, the city opened its gates on the 21st February 1082.⁹¹⁶

The harsh winter periods in the mountainous regions of Illyria and western Macedonia were the main cause for Robert Guiscard's inability to take advantage of his success over Alexius' army. While the Norman campaign was lingering in the surrounding areas of the River Diabolis, the Emperor had already established Thessaloniki as a rallying point for the remnants of his troops coming from Illyria. However, the Imperial Treasury was empty and the collapsed Byzantine economy could not afford the hiring of extra mercenary troops.⁹¹⁷ Thus, the Emperor resulted to the unpopular measure of confiscating precious ecclesiastical

⁹¹³ *Alexiad*, V. i, p. 223; Sewter, p. 155.

⁹¹⁴ Malaterra, 3. 28; *Gesta*, IV. 449-60, p. 228.

⁹¹⁵ Matthiew, *La Geste de Robert Guiscard*, pp. 323-4; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 45-49.

⁹¹⁶ Our only source for the exact date is: *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1082.

⁹¹⁷ *Alexiad*, V. i, pp. 225-6; Sewter, p. 156.

objects from various churches in the capital.⁹¹⁸ According to old ecclesiastical canons the Emperor had the right to confiscate ecclesiastical objects in order to pay the ransom of prisoners of war. In our case, the entire Christian population of Asia Minor was held prisoners by the Seljucs, according to Alexius Comnenus. The government had the support of the residential Synod and of the Patriarch Eustathios Garidas (1081-84) and so the measure went on with no serious protests.

With the coming of the spring, Robert Guiscard left Illyria and proceeded further east, where we would have expected him to follow the Via Egnatia, from Achrida to Thessaloniki. The Via Egnatia was one of the two most significant land routes that linked Constantinople with Europe. It followed a course through Thrace (Adrianople), Macedonia though Thessaloniki and Edessa (slav. Vodena), then was passing north of Kastoria to Achrida and directly west to the Illyrian port of Dyrrachium that linked the Balkans with Italy.⁹¹⁹ To return to the Normans, Robert Guiscard instead of marching his army to Thessaloniki, turned southwards towards the western Macedonian city of Kastoria. And since the Emperor was in the capital until the month of May, our main primary source is Malaterra. We are not sure about Guiscard's motives on turning south, but I suspect that he might have wanted to have his flanks covered. Kastoria was also one of the major cities of the Greek mainland and a great merchant city and export centre in the Ottoman period.⁹²⁰ Guiscard might also have been aware that 300 Varangians – probably a regiment detached by Alexius while on his way to Dyrrachium the previous October – were defending the city, since this is one of the few numbers that Malaterra gives us in his entire narrative on the invasion.⁹²¹ Whatever the case, the siege of the city did not last for long since, as Malaterra lets us know, the Varangians decided to come to terms before the Normans had even brought their siege machines in front

⁹¹⁸ Ibid., V. ii, pp. 226-7; Sewter, pp. 157-8.

⁹¹⁹ Whittow, "Geographical Survey", 219-31; Belke, "Communications, Roads and Bridges", 296; F. O' Sullivan, *The Egnatian Way*, Newton Abbot, 1972.

⁹²⁰ A. Glavinias, "Οι Νορμανδοί στην Καστοριά (1082-1083)", *Byzantina*, 13ii (1985), Thessaloniki, 1256-7.

⁹²¹ Malaterra, 3. 29.

of the city's defences, another sign of the declining morale in the Imperial army's units. The city probably fell in the month of March or early April 1082.⁹²²

Regarding the military preparations of the Byzantines, we do not have any information about the units employed apart from the hiring of an unknown number of Seljuc troops.⁹²³ These aforementioned soldiers must have been individuals from the Sultanate of Rum flocking in search for pay and must not be confused with the 7,000 Seljucs officially sent by Sulleyman I next year. In addition, Alexius once more set in motion the mechanisms of the Byzantine diplomacy that had worked so well for him about eight months ago. In early April 1082,⁹²⁴ the Emperor sent another embassy to the German Emperor Henry IV promising lavish gifts and a royal marriage.⁹²⁵ But while these negotiations were under way, Henry IV was already marching south to Italy in full force against Gregory VII and a fresh Apulian revolt had broken out, probably stirred up by Byzantine agents (Abelard, most likely, since we have already seen him acting as an Imperial agent in Apulia last year).⁹²⁶ A messenger arrived to notify Guiscard about the events back home around the month of April 1082 and preparations for his departure immediately went under way.

This was an extremely significant turning point for the Norman invasion of Greece and although no Norman troops were taken back to Italy, the fact that the leader and mastermind of the entire expedition abandoned his troops in hostile ground was to prove a fatal decision.

⁹²² Glavinias, "Οι Νορμανδοί στην Καστοριά", n. 2, 1256; Anna seems to place the capture of the city after Guiscard's departure for Italy, but in this case Malaterra seems to be better informed about the events.

⁹²³ *Alexiad*, V. iii, p. 231; Sewter, p. 160.

⁹²⁴ Since Alexius left the capital to fight the Norman host at Ioannina in May, according to Anna, these negotiations must have taken place during the month of April. See: *Alexiad*, V. iii, pp. 232-3; Sewter, p. 161.

⁹²⁵ See: *Alexiad*, V. iii, pp. 231-3; Sewter, pp. 160-1, and compare with the previous round of negotiations: *Alexiad*, III. x, pp. 173-5; Sewter, pp. 126-8.

⁹²⁶ Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, pp. 219, 244; Chalandon, *Domination Normande*, pp. 273-4; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, pp. 452-68; McQueen, "Relations between the Normans and Byzantium", 443-4.

Not only the capture of Thessaloniki was postponed indefinitely, until its final capture a hundred and three years later, but Bohemond was left to face an opponent of about the same age but with much greater experience in warfare, who was also fighting in his home ground. Bohemond, who was chosen to lead the campaign after his father's departure for Italy was, no doubt, a brave and ambitious officer who was not yet at the peak of his military career. But Robert Guiscard's forty years of combat experience in the battlefields of southern Italy and Sicily would have been more suitable to take the right decisions in times of crisis like, for example, during the stalemate on the outskirts of Larisa in the winter of 1082/3. However, the Norman Duke thought it would be better to attend his affairs in Apulia and Rome personally, while he appointed his son Bohemond as commander-in-chief of his forces in Greece, with the Count of Brienne (constable of Apulia and lord of St-Mango sul Calore)⁹²⁷ as his deputy, and hastily embarked in a monoreme for Italy, probably around the end of April 1082.⁹²⁸

Bohemond resumed the operations in north-western Macedonia as soon as he was appointed commander-in-chief by his father and he immediately marched south-westwards towards the Epirotic capital of Ioannina.⁹²⁹ The first question that comes in mind is why the Norman army deviated from his primary target, Thessaloniki, and why did Bohemond decided to occupy Ioannina so further south from the Via Egnatia? The answer to the first part of the question is not hard to imagine, that with Robert Guiscard back in Italy it seemed almost inconceivable for the small, inexperienced and not properly equipped Norman army to undertake such a task, especially with young Bohemond in command. We cannot be sure about Bohemond's motives on his turn south towards Epirus, but it is highly likely that his decision was greatly "influenced" by his father's advice before his departure. He might have thought that his affairs in Italy would not have kept him there for long and that he would soon

⁹²⁷ For Bryennius see: Loud, "Anna Komnena", 49, n. 37

⁹²⁸ *Alexiad*, V. iii, pp. 232-3; Sewter, pp. 161-2; *Gesta*, IV. 524-27, p. 232.

⁹²⁹ Compare with Bohemond's march through the Greek mainland fifteen years later: J.H. Pryor, "Modelling Bohemond's march to Thessalonike", *Logistics of Warfare in the Age of the Crusades*, ed. J. H. Pryor, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, 1-25.

be back to Greece to resume hostilities. Thus, Guiscard might have wanted his son to secure what had already been conquered, meaning the areas of Illyria, coastal Epirus and western Macedonia. As we saw before, it is possible that Guiscard would have been aware of the presence of the 300 Varangians at Kastoria and, fearful for his army's flanks and for the presence of any other strong contingents of enemy troops in his rear, he would have wanted to sweep Epirus and western Macedonia off any enemy elements.

Another factor that could have influenced the Norman advance southwards and later on eastwards to Larisa, something which has been mildly mentioned by Chalandon and had not been picked up by any scholar since, is the role of the Vlach populations of these regions and their cooperation with the Normans. The first mentioning of the term Vlach in Byzantine primary sources is made by Skylitzes⁹³⁰ and the term vaguely refers to the Latinised populations of the predominately Greek-speaking inhabitants of the Balkan Peninsula during the Imperial Roman period, with its origin being Germanic (*walhs*) meaning “foreigner” or “neighbour”. These pockets of Latin-speaking population in the Greek mainland took the name *Aromanians* (from the –a and the Latin adjective *romanus*, meaning citizens of the Roman State) and could have been found, during the ninth and tenth centuries mainly in Thessaly (Larisa being its capital) and western Macedonia.⁹³¹ Due to the great dissatisfaction of these populations of Thessaly regarding high taxation and corrupt state officials, a great revolt is reported around the end of 1065 or the beginning of 1066, led by a powerful magnate of the region of Larisa called Nikulitsa Delfin – clearly of Bulgarian origin. And even though this revolt was short-lived, an agreement between its leader and the Emperor's

⁹³⁰ Skylitzes, II, p. 329.

⁹³¹ For more on the Vlachs, see: A. Madgearu, *The wars of the Balkan Peninsula: their medieval origins*, Scarecrow Press, Lanham, 2008, pp. 28-36; V. A. Friedman, “The Vlach Minority in Macedonia: Language, Identity, Dialectology, and Standardization”, *Selected Papers in Slavic, Balkan, and Balkan Studies*, University of Helsinki, Helsinki, 21 (2001), 26-50; D. Dvoichenko-Markov, “The Vlachs”, *Byzantion*, 54 (1984), 508-26; *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. III, p. 2183.

officials was eventually reached.⁹³² Although the purpose of my research is not to analyse the geographical expansion of the Vlachs in the Greek mainland or to go into great details regarding the 1065/66 revolt, I simply intend to raise this particular question: In connection with Chalandon's comments about possible alliance talks between Robert Guiscard and Vlach leaders in 1066,⁹³³ do we consider Bohemond's turn southwards as a coincidence? Bearing in mind the almost certain hatred of these, mainly nomadic, populations for the Byzantine government, along with the view of the Vlachs as liars, thieves and beggars by the contemporary Byzantine authors,⁹³⁴ the answer would be negative. If there were, indeed, any talks held in 1066 or afterwards I have not been able to trace anything in the primary sources, but we do have to be suspicious about Bohemond's movements in the Greek mainland from now on.

In late April 1082,⁹³⁵ Bohemond marched from western Macedonia to Epirus and towards Ioannina, following roughly the course Korytsa-Konitsa-Kalpaktion-Bella-Kalama.⁹³⁶ During his journey, his army was reinforced by elements of the Byzantine Army who deserted to the Normans.⁹³⁷ Bohemond could have taken advantage of these men's knowledge of the local terrain, meaning the routes leading southwards through the rough and inhospitable Pindos mountains, while they could have betrayed to him the numbers of Ioannina's garrison. But the inhabitants of Ioannina quickly capitulated in order to avoid any destruction and pillaging by the Norman forces. Thus Bohemond's contribution to the reinforcement of the city's defences during his short stay in the region is significant, although it has been pointed out that he has been credited with more than he could actually have achieved. And this is due to

⁹³² Fine, *Early Medieval Balkans*, pp. 216-17; Ferluga, "Les Insurrections des Slaves", pp. 391-92.

⁹³³ Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, pp. 60-61, 85-86.

⁹³⁴ "The Vlachs is a nation of wicked liars who are completely untrustworthy, and do not believe in God nor in any king, relative or friend." Cecaumenos, pp. 74-5.

⁹³⁵ *Alexiad*, V. iv, p. 236; Sewter, p. 163.

⁹³⁶ Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica*, p. 57.

⁹³⁷ *Alexiad*, V. iv, p. 236; Sewter, p. 163.

the usual problem that the archaeologists face when a site has been used for many periods in history, in our case the Byzantine (*Despotat of Epirus*) and the Ottoman.⁹³⁸ From what scattered evidence that archaeology can give us, we know that the city's citadel was built sometime in the tenth century. The fact, however, that the Normans reinforced Ioannina's fortifications with a second "most strong" acropolis, a typical strategy employed by them in Italy and Sicily as we saw in a previous chapter, is given to us by Anna: "After making an inspection of the ramparts and recognizing that the citadel was in a dangerous condition, he [Bohemond] not only did his best to restore it, but built another of great strength at a different section of the walls where it seemed to him that it would be most useful."⁹³⁹

Alexius left Constantinople with the troops that he had managed to collect in the past 3-4 months to face the Normans at Ioannina. Trying to assess the numbers and consistency of the Emperor's army is very difficult because even Anna, our only detailed source for this period of events, gives us little information to work with. However, it is most likely that a large part of the conscripts recruited for the Dyrrachium campaign would have returned home instead of reporting to Thessaloniki. So we are almost certain that the Byzantine army was outnumbered by the Norman host. Through Anna's narrative⁹⁴⁰ we see that Alexius had learned a valuable lesson from his previous experience against the Normans, thus his decision to send skirmishing detachments to harass the Norman camp and gather intelligence regarding their numbers and the commanding skills and fighting capabilities of their leader Bohemond. The Emperor, "fearing the first charge of the Latins", also adopted a new and rather innovative battle-tactic. He had a number of small and light chariots, with spears fixed on top of them, put behind the first lines of his division in the centre with infantry men hiding underneath and ready to emerge and manoeuvre them when the Norman cavalry charge was at a striking distance from the Byzantine lines. However, "as though he had foreknowledge of the Roman

⁹³⁸ On the fortifications of Ioannina: L. Vranousses, *Ιστορικά και τοπογραφικά του Μεσαιωνικού κάστρου των Ιωαννίνων*, Athens, 1968.

⁹³⁹ *Alexiad*, V. iv, pp. 236-7; Sewter, p. 163.

⁹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, V. iv, pp. 237-9; Sewter, pp. 163-4.

plan he [Bohemond] had adapted himself to the changed circumstances.” Bohemond’s answer was to divide his forces into two major units and attack the flanks of the Imperial Army, thus engaging into a *mêlée* that quickly led the terrified Byzantines to flee the battlefield. Thus, the Byzantine disorderly retreat from the battlefield makes us think that either there was no heavy cavalry at all, or that unit was simply swept away by the Norman knights who then immediately turned and attacked the infantry.

The next confrontation is poorly placed chronologically and geographically, and if someone reads the *Alexiad* he gets the impression that it took place a couple of days after the first battle of Ioannina. However, it should have taken several weeks for Alexius to go to Thessaloniki, get his troops ready and then march back south to Epirus. Due to Anna’s brief statement that “the armies were assembled once more and when the mercenaries were ready he [Alexius] marched against Bohemond...”,⁹⁴¹ we understand that these units might have been summoned to Thessaloniki for the previous campaign, but probably failed to arrive on time and simply stayed there and awaited for new orders. In the meanwhile, Bohemond probably left Ioannina and headed further south-east towards the southern Epirotic coast and the city of Arta,⁹⁴² just a few kilometres north of Vonitsa which had been taken by Guiscard at the end of May 1081.

Alexius devised a similar plan like the one at Ioannina, with his primary aim being to disrupt the Norman heavy cavalry charge that had proved irresistible so far. According to Anna,⁹⁴³ who again is our only detailed source for the events, on the previous day of the battle the Emperor had his men set up iron caltrops (*τριβολος*) in front of the centre of his formation where he expected the Norman cavalry attack to take place, in order “to frustrate the first (and decisive) charge when the caltrops pierced the horses’ hooves”. In addition to the setting up of the caltrops, this time the Byzantine front lines would have had the support of peltasts who were deployed behind the infantry front lines of the centre. After the first

⁹⁴¹ *Alexiad*, V. iv, p. 239; Sewter, p. 164.

⁹⁴² Malaterra, 3. 29.

⁹⁴³ For this battle, see: *Alexiad*, V. iv, pp. 239-40; Sewter, pp. 164-5.

Norman cavalry charge had been neutralised, the wings (for which we do not know their composition but probably light cavalry units) were to advance and immediately attack the frustrated knights in an encircling manoeuvre that could well have won the battlefield for Alexius. The course of the battle, however, was a repetition of what had taken place at Ioannina, with Bohemond finding out about the Byzantine plans, either by treason or simply by sending scouts close to the enemy lines, and the result was another cavalry attack on the Imperial Army's flanks which quickly melted away once again.⁹⁴⁴

What we need to underline at this point is the knowledge of this specific tactic of using obstacles, in our case chariots and caltrops, to obstruct the advance of a heavy cavalry unit. According to the *On Tactics*, these obstacles like the caltrops were used in the perimeter of a camp to protect it from surprise cavalry attacks.⁹⁴⁵ They were apparently tied together with strings so that they could be recovered even when hidden in grass. In addition, the author of the sixth century treatise *On Strategy* refers to caltrops as a measure to defend a camp from enemy attack while he specifically writes about iron plates put on the horses' hooves so that they will not be injured during an attack.⁹⁴⁶ The *Taktika* of Nicephoros Ouranos also mention caltrops, as well as other devices, to be placed in the ditches surrounding a camp.⁹⁴⁷ I am not aware of any cases where Alexius had actually used this specific battle-tactic before in any operational theatre, but this proves the continuity of long-established battle tactics and reinforces the argument which puts the officers of the Byzantine army studying several military manuals of their time.

⁹⁴⁴ "They were frightened before the battle started because of their previous disaster and did not dare to look their opponents in the face." See: *Alexiad*, V. iv, p. 241; Sewter, p. 165.

⁹⁴⁵ "On Tactics", 2. 17-20, p. 263; these are also mentioned in: "On Strategy", 6. 12-3, p. 22, 38. 25-27, p. 114.

⁹⁴⁶ "On Strategy", 6. 12, p. 22; 17. 17-18, pp. 56-58.

⁹⁴⁷ J.-A. De Foucault, "Douze chapitres inédits de la tactique de Nicephore Ouranos", *Travaux et Memoires*, 5 (1973), 298-300.

With the Emperor retiring to Thessaloniki and then to the capital, Bohemond was free to expand his dominions in the Greek mainland and march further north and east.⁹⁴⁸ From Arta he turned north-east towards Skopje (Skoupoi) and the surrounding regions of Two Polovoi, south of Skopje, and Achrida to the west. We learn from Anna the names of his two senior officers that were sent to occupy the aforementioned towns, Peter of Aulps who took Two Polovoi and Raoul, Count of Pontoise who subdued Skopje. The castle of Achrida was defended by a certain Ariebes who managed to repel the repeated attacks made by Bohemond's troops, forcing the latter to quit the siege and move towards Ostrobos, east of modern day Florina in western Macedonia, where he was again forced to withdraw. From there he probably plundered Verroia, Servia (a town south of Verroia), Edessa (slav. Vodena),⁹⁴⁹ Almopia (slav. Moglena, east of Edessa), although Anna's narrative is not entirely clear whether these areas were indeed occupied or not, reaching through the Vardar valley to *Aspres Ecclesies* (*Ἀσπρες Εκκλησιές*) on the north-western suburbs of Thessaloniki. He captured the aforementioned town and stayed there for about three months (autumn 1082), while afterwards he marched towards Kastoria.

The course that Bohemond followed is not coincidental at all, and only if we trace his route on a map we will understand why. Once more we have to say that the primary target of the Norman campaign was the capital of Macedonia, Thessaloniki, and the main route that connected it with Dyrrachium was the Via Egnatia. The cities of Achrida, Florina and Modena/Edessa were situated exactly on the Via, while Verroia, Servia and Moglena controlled the southern approaches. But going for the siege of Thessaloniki, as we have repeatedly said, was not an issue for the small Norman army and, due to Kastoria's cold and damp winter climate, the Norman leader decided to transfer his winter camp further south to the fields of Thessaly, one of the warmest and most fertile places in the Balkans. His march

⁹⁴⁸ *Alexiad*, V. v, pp. 242-4; Sewter, pp. 166-67.

⁹⁴⁹ In the main Byzantine period, the Slavic name-places had dominated over the Roman and ancient-Greek. That is why our sources refer to them with their Slavic names. The Greek terms are provided so that the reader can trace these places to a modern-day map.

southwards took him through Pelagonia and Trikala (in the middle between Ioannina and Larisa), while another detachment subdued Tziviskos,⁹⁵⁰ clearly intending to spend the winter in the Thessalian fertile plains.

Considering the date of the beginning of the siege of Larisa, Anna Comnena says the following: “He [Bohemond] then moved on to Larisa, arriving in full force on St-George the Martyr’s Day.”⁹⁵¹ All the non-Greek scholars who have dealt with this event have accepted the 23rd April – St-George’s day, as the day when Bohemond came to Larisa, meaning that until then he had pitched his camp at Trikala and had sent a detachment to enforce a blockade of the city.⁹⁵² It is most likely though that Anna Comnena meant the 3rd November, which commemorates the consecration of a cathedral dedicated to St-George in Lydda, south-east of today’s Tel-Aviv in Israel, during the reign of Constantine the Great (305-337).⁹⁵³ This does not seem to have any major implications in the turn of events that winter, although we have to note that the defenders of Larisa would certainly have been more reluctant to try and break the blockade if that was enforced by the main Norman force under Bohemond himself. As for the city of Larisa, for which we know next to nothing about its medieval fortifications or Anna gives us any details, it was entrusted to the experienced officer Leo Cephalas who managed to resist the besiegers for around six months before the blockade began to take its toll on the morale of the population.⁹⁵⁴

Alexius once again resorted to diplomacy to deal with the Normans and spread discord and discontent among the senior of Bohemond’s officials. Unfortunately, the *Alexiad* does not give us any details of the conspiracy but we do know that three senior figures in the Norman army, Peter of Aulps, a certain Renaldus and another called William were accused of

⁹⁵⁰ *Alexiad*, V. v, p. 244; Sewter, p. 167.

⁹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, V. v, p. 244; Sewter, p. 167.

⁹⁵² Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. 88; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, p. 20; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 219; Taviani-Carozzi, *La terreur du monde*, p. 471.

⁹⁵³ A. Glavinias, “Οι Νορμανδοί στην Θεσσαλία και η πολιορκία της Λάρισας (1082-1083)”, *Byzantiaka*, 4 (1984), 39-40.

⁹⁵⁴ *Alexiad*, V. v, pp. 245-7; Sewter, p. 168.

conspiracy to desert to the Emperor. In addition, about early winter 1082 the Emperor asked for a large mercenary force from Sulleyman I, thus receiving a division of 7,000 men under a certain Kamyres.⁹⁵⁵ The Byzantine preparations went on throughout the winter with the intention of marching towards Thessaly early in the spring of 1083. And while Alexius was raising troops in the capital, the Patriarch of Jerusalem Euthemius, along with Pakourianus, were sent to Thessaloniki (probably in late 1082/early 1083) to gather additional units and see if they could break some sort of a deal with Bohemond.⁹⁵⁶

Probably in the month of March (1083) the Emperor left Constantinople to raise the siege of the Thessalian capital. Nothing is given about the numbers and consistency of his army, with his march towards Larisa taking him through a series of strategically important locations in medieval Thessaly; passing through the very narrow valley of Tempí (the only route southwards coming from Thessaloniki), he reached Plabitzá, north-east of Larisa and close to a river which is not named by Anna due to a *lacunae*, but probably modern Pineios.⁹⁵⁷ Alexius obviously wished to avoid a direct contact with the Norman troops for now, and so he marched through the southern approaches of the city of Larisa and headed west, through the “Gardens of Delfina” towards Trikala, where he arrived in late March/early April without encountering any resistance.⁹⁵⁸

Being aware of the poor morale and fighting experience of his troops, the Emperor wisely decided to avoid a fourth battle and to lay a series of ambushes instead. But before that, he followed the necessary steps dictated by the *Praecepta Militaria* and the *De Rei Militari* for

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., V. v, p. 244; Sewter, p. 167.

⁹⁵⁶ The only source that mentions this is: *Typicon Gregorii Pacuriani interpretatus est Michael Tarchnisvili*, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, vol. 144, Louvain, 1954, p. 49, as cited by: Glavinás, “Οι Νορμανδοί στην Θεσσαλία”, 37; Anna only mentions Pakourianus at Moglena, east of Edessa, where he put to the sword the small Norman garrison. See: *Alexiad*, V. v, p. 244; Sewter, p. 167.

⁹⁵⁷ *Alexiad*, V. v, p. 245; Sewter, pp. 167-8; Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica*, pp. 60-61; Glavinás, “Οι Νορμανδοί στη Θεσσαλία”, 37-38.

⁹⁵⁸ I could not identify the location of the “Gardens of Delfina”, but it should be somewhere west of Larisa. See: *Alexiad*, V. v, p. 245; Sewter, p. 168.

the precautions taken before an encounter with the enemy forces.⁹⁵⁹ Anna does not let us know whether he sent any scouts to reconnoitre the enemy camp, although it seems likely that he did, but Alexius got a local man and asked numerous questions about the topography of Larisa and the surrounding areas, for “he wished to lay an ambush there and so defeat the Latins by guile, for he had given up any idea of open hand-to-hand conflict; after many clashes of this kind – and defeats – he had acquired experience of the Frankish tactics in battle.”⁹⁶⁰

The ambush that was planned against the Normans was primarily based on the use of the feigned retreat tactics, this time used by the Byzantines. Anna Comnena once more describes in detail Alexius’ war-council that took place on the day before the battle, where he explained his strategy to his senior officers including the Caesar Nicephoros Melissinos and Basil Curticius.⁹⁶¹ Alexius’ plan was simple but brilliant; he intended to hand over the command of his forces and his personal standards to the aforementioned officers, and instruct them to form their battle lines “in their usual manner followed in former engagements”, somewhere on the east of the city. The orders that the officers in command were given were to attack the Norman front lines and engage in moderate skirmish before turning their backs to them in a disorderly retreat towards a location named Lykostomio (*Wolf’s mouth*), probably somewhere on the west of Larisa. In the meantime, Alexius would have taken a unit of elite cavalry at the area close to Lykostomio the night before,⁹⁶² to pillage the Norman camp and lay an ambush on the unsuspected Norman knights.

The Byzantine strategy worked as planned. The Normans immediately fell into Alexius’ trap, thus opening the battle themselves with a full-frontal cavalry charge that was directed

⁹⁵⁹ “Praecepta Militaria”, IV. 192-208, p. 50; Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, III. 9, p. 84-85.

⁹⁶⁰ *Alexiad*, V. v, pp. 246-7; Sewter, p. 168-9.

⁹⁶¹ *Alexiad*, V. v, pp. 247-8; Sewter, p. 169.

⁹⁶² Anna mentions the defile of Livotanon, Rebenikon and Allage marking his course from the east to the west of the city, but I was unable to trace these places on a map. See: *Alexiad*, V. v, p. 249; Sewter, pp. 169-70.

against the division where the Imperial standards could be seen. While the main Byzantine forces were being pursued by the two cavalry divisions led by Bohemond and the Count of Brienne, Alexius' next move was to send a small force of mounted archers and peltasts to harass the pursuing Normans and tempt them to turn around and engage them. Alexius had advised these soldiers to "shoot great numbers of arrows from a distance and at the horses rather than the riders. For all Kelts whenever they dismount they become very easy prey."⁹⁶³ This was a clever advice given by Alexius, because he must have been aware that the short bows of his mounted archers were unlikely to penetrate a Norman knight's shield or hauberk,⁹⁶⁴ but their horses were much more vulnerable and when dismounted the Normans were indeed a much easier prey for an elite cavalry unit.

For a second time in a few hours the Normans under Brienne took the bait.⁹⁶⁵ The Byzantine archers did what they were ordered to do and soon "Bryennius' men, as their chargers fell, began to circle round and round in a great mass."⁹⁶⁶ However, the Count managed to send for reinforcements and, if Anna is correct, the messengers found Bohemond having pitched a temporary camp on a small river-island called Salabria, with himself eating grapes.⁹⁶⁷ From this small detail we understand that, even though Anna and William of Apulia do not give us any date for these events, this may have taken place in late July, since Bohemond would not had been able to eat grapes in May or June. However, since this conclusion jumps a period of around three months we have to be very cautious about Anna's accuracy, even more so since William of Apulia does not mention this detail. Is Anna trying to conceal any negotiations between Alexius and Bohemond? We cannot be sure, but it is at least possible, especially if we bear in mind that Pakourianus along with the Patriarch of Jerusalem were sent early that year to Thessaloniki to do just that.

⁹⁶³ *Alexiad*, V. vi, p. 251; Sewter, p. 171.

⁹⁶⁴ For the Byzantine bows of this period, see: Kaegi, "The contribution of archery", 237-49

⁹⁶⁵ *Gesta*, V. 32-42, p. 238.

⁹⁶⁶ *Alexiad*, V. vi, p. 251; Sewter, p. 171.

⁹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, V. vi, p. 252; Sewter, p. 171.

The final defeat of the Norman contingents took place the next morning in a narrow and marshy area on the outskirts of Larisa where they had pitched their camp. A few elite “Turkish and Sarmatian” mounted archers were sent by Alexius to lure the Normans out of their camp, with Bohemond not taking the bait this time and ordering his men to dismount (if they had managed to get to their horses) and “stand firm in serried ranks, protecting themselves shield-to-shield”,⁹⁶⁸ clearly deployed in a phalanx formation probably after Bryennius’ bitter experience on the previous day. However, panic was spread in the Norman ranks when Bohemond’s standard-bearer was killed and they eventually fled to Trikala.⁹⁶⁹

After Bohemond’s retreat, Alexius went back to Thessaloniki from where he once again set the mechanisms of Byzantine diplomacy against his enemies. His aim was to spread discord and disaffection amongst the senior officers of Bohemond’s army for their leader, with them demanding their payment for two and a half years of campaigning in a hostile country.⁹⁷⁰ With Bohemond being unable to meet their demands he was forced by the deteriorating atmosphere within the ranks of his soldiers and officers to pull back, first to Kastoria – where he installed the Count of Brienne as governor and Peter of Aulps at the Two Polovoi with an unknown number of men – and then to Avlona in the early August of 1083.⁹⁷¹

With the main Norman army ready to embark for Italy, the most significant outpost left in Norman hands was Kastoria. We do not know whether Bohemond had left garrison troops in the town since the spring of 1082, but it seems to me highly unlikely that he would have had sufficient manpower with him to afford a strong garrison in the city. A similar tactic like the one applied during the conquest of Calabria and Sicily two decades ago, meaning the extraction of tribute or a simple oath by the local population might had been enough. So what

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid., V. vii, pp. 253-4; Sewter, p. 172.

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid., V. vii, p. 255; Sewter, p. 173; *Gesta*, V. 71-74, p. 240.

⁹⁷⁰ The Emperor promised lavish gifts, high Court titles and to accept any deserters into the Imperial Army: *Alexiad*, V. vii, pp. 255-6; Sewter, p. 173.

⁹⁷¹ Ibid., V. viii, p. 256; Sewter, p. 173; William of Apulia only mentions Bohemond’s retreat to Avlona and Bryennius’ placement at Kastoria: *Gesta*, V. 75-76, p. 240.

made Kastoria so important to the Normans as to install a garrison when everything seemed to have been in such a desperate situation? Probably the city's location, because it was the only major city on the Via Egnatia's part between Achrída and Thessaloniki that they thought they could hold. However, even that last Norman outpost in the Greek mainland was about to fall to Byzantine hands, probably sometime in early October 1083.

The *Alexiad* once again is our only source for the siege of Kastoria by the Imperial troops.⁹⁷² With siege machines, namely helepoleis, having a poor impact on the city's defences and enemy morale, Alexius came up with a brilliant plan which reminds us of the conquest of Palermo (1072) and Jerusalem (1099). In brief, he was to send a number of elite troops under George Paleologos in small vessels to launch an attack on the city from the side of the lake, and at the same time the Emperor would attack from the land and attempt to draw the attention of the defenders on him while Paleologos' party would be climbing the walls almost undetected. Because everything worked as planned Bryennius' Counts decided to call it a day,⁹⁷³ with the majority of them actually deserting to the Emperor, while the Count of Brienne was made to swear never to take up arms against the Empire again. Thus ended the siege of the last outpost still in Norman hands, probably around the end of October or early November of 1083.⁹⁷⁴ None of the primary sources mention the departure of Bohemond to Italy, but it seems quite likely that he decided to spend the winter in Illyria, not risking a passage to Italy in November, especially if we consider the fact that he joined his father at Salerno soon after Henry IV had left Italy, in May 1084.⁹⁷⁵

In the aftermath of the lifting of the siege of the city of Larisa, within the next few months almost all the Norman conquests in the Illyrian and Greek mainland had been recovered by Alexius. Already since the summer of 1083 a Venetian naval expeditionary force of unknown

⁹⁷² *Alexiad*, VI. i, p. 269; Sewter, p. 181.

⁹⁷³ *Alexiad*, VI. i, pp. 271-2; Sewter, p. 182.

⁹⁷⁴ Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica*, p. 61; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, p. 21; Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. 91; Glavinas, "Οι Νορμανδοί στην Καστοριά", 1262.

⁹⁷⁵ *Alexiad*, V. iii, p. 234; Sewter, p. 162.

size recaptured the city of Dyrrachium, with the exception of the citadel which resisted stoutly.⁹⁷⁶ The Venetians spent the winter in the city, but recognising the danger the proximity of the citadel posed to them they chose to remain in their ships and in a small wooden *castrum* they hastily erected close to the city's port. Also, Avlona was captured shortly after Bohemond's departure while the local population of Corfu, apparently after finding out about the Norman failed expedition, rebelled against the Duke with only the citadel remaining firmly in Norman hands.⁹⁷⁷

The causes of the Norman failure of the invasion are numerous, but all of them have their root in one important factor. And that is the fact that the Norman army operated far from its home base and in a hostile ground. The inhospitable terrain of the Illyrian, Epirotic and western Macedonian regions, with their cold and humid winters, diseases that could have any medieval army depleted in large numbers and in a very short period of time, especially in the marshy area of Dyrrachium as we saw earlier, the immensely difficult task of transporting provisions and reinforcements from the home-bases, something imperative when living off the land was not sufficient enough as the surrounding areas of Dyrrachium proved to the Normans. Further, we had the eventual casualties in battle or siege operations, and even if Bohemond had thirteen hundred knights when his father left him in charge of the army in 1082, he certainly could not spare a single unnecessary loss. But he had to man a number of castles that would secure his route back to Dyrrachium, and although we are unaware of the numbers involved in this task, it certainly was a heavy burden for the small army Bohemond commanded. Finally, we have to mention the absence of the campaign's natural leader, Robert Guiscard, who although had left a capable commander in his place for whom no doubt can be raised about his fighting skills, his absence would have been felt throughout the ranks of his army, and especially his knights many of whom were veterans of the Italian and Sicilian campaigns, thus used to serving under him in almost every battle or siege.

⁹⁷⁶ *Gesta*, V. 80-93, p. 240.

⁹⁷⁷ *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 286; Sewter, p. 189.

10. The second Norman invasion. From autumn 1084 to Robert Guiscard's death in the summer of 1085

Robert Guiscard's preparations for his second invasion of Byzantine Illyria in the autumn of 1084, probably started immediately after he was free from his preoccupations in the Eternal City, where he had marched in the month of May that year to the rescue of Gregory VII from Henry IV's Imperial troops. By the time he arrived at the city with his army, in late May, the German Emperor had already retired back to Germany with the Normans engaging on a fierce urban conflict with the citizens of Rome who wanted Gregory expelled from the throne of St-Peter.⁹⁷⁸ In examining the size of the Norman army that was mobilised against Henry IV, William of Apulia's *Gesta* tells us that the Norman Duke led to Rome 6,000 cavalry and 30,000 foot-soldiers.⁹⁷⁹ These numbers may seem as an exaggerated figure, but if we reduce the cavalry to about a half of what the *Gesta* give us we might get much closer to the truth, if we bear in mind that even troops from Sicily under Guiscard's brother Roger had arrived as reinforcements.⁹⁸⁰ The crucial question is how many of these troops that were mobilised in May 1084 would have taken part in the Illyrian campaign four months later?

Unfortunately, the primary sources are even more silent about the numbers and consistency of the Norman army in 1084 than they were for the 1081 campaign. The only names of high-ranking officers that are mentioned to have followed Guiscard across the Adriatic were his four sons, namely Bohemond, Roger (Borsa), Robert and Guy,⁹⁸¹ while Geoffrey of Conversano was also made to join the Duke after his previous rebellion in 1082-83.⁹⁸² Judging by the size of the May expedition and the danger posed by a German army marching against the Norman capital Salerno, many of Robert Guiscard's vassals would have

⁹⁷⁸ *Gesta*, IV. 546-564, p. 234; Malaterra, 3. 37; Loud, *Robert Guiscard*, p. 221.

⁹⁷⁹ "Milia sex equitum, triginta milia Romam Duxerat hic peditum", see: *Gesta*, IV. 565-566, p. 234; Malaterra is less accurate, see: Malaterra, 3. 37.

⁹⁸⁰ Malaterra, 3. 36.

⁹⁸¹ *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 282; Sewter, pp. 188-9; *Gesta*, V. 154-158, p. 244.

⁹⁸² Orderic Vitalis, IV, p. 32; VII, p. 32.

been summoned to bring their quotas to Salerno in preparation for the march northwards. Would the Duke have been able to force them for a second time within less than six months to mobilise their troops, this time for a campaign overseas? The answer would be positive only if we consider that they would have been promised large sums of money and a share on the spoils of war because, as we will see further on, this time Robert was aiming at the financial centres of the southern Greek mainland, namely Athens, Corinth and Thebes.

For this campaign, William of Apulia gives us the figure of some 120 ships that were mobilised to carry the Norman army across the Adriatic in the autumn.⁹⁸³ We do not know with certainty the ratio between transport ships and warships, but probably less than a quarter of this fleet would have been warships if we bear in mind that in the following naval engagements between the Norman and the Venetian fleets, Guiscard had twenty-five warships in his disposal, all of them being “inferior to their [Byzantine and Venetian] ships.”⁹⁸⁴ This leaves us with around 80-90 transport vessels that would have carried the bulk of Guiscard’s army to Avlona. Even if all of them were specially modified horse-transport ships, something highly unlikely, bearing in mind the average capacity of 15 horses in each ship as we have seen in a previous chapter, this would have given us a number of 1,275 horses being carried from Italy.

This number, although quite reasonable if we recall the numbers of the 1081 campaign, must be much lower since Anna Comnena mentions that Robert Guiscard had dispatched all of his cavalry force, under Roger and Guy, to capture Avlona sometime prior to the departure of the main fleet.⁹⁸⁵ However, I believe that a number maybe even half of the 1,275 mentioned before would seem much more realistic. As for the foot-soldiers, bearing in mind the maximum capacity of 108 men in a tenth century Byzantine dromon, which certainly

⁹⁸³ *Gesta*, V. 143, p. 244; not 150 ships as Chalandon erroneously notes, see: Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, p. 91.

⁹⁸⁴ *Gesta*, V. 155-158, p. 244.

⁹⁸⁵ *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 282; Sewter, p. 189; Malaterra tells us that Bohemond was sent as well, see: Malaterra, 3. 40.

would not had been the case for the Norman transport ships, this would give us a maximum of 9,180 men. Again this number is surely exaggerated and we should narrow it down to at least a third.

Whatever the case, even after these very risky calculations, my point is that the numbers mobilised for the 1084 campaign were, almost certainly, much lower than three years before. Both Anna Comnena and William of Apulia overestimate, in their usual manner, the size of the Norman host, but there is no doubt that their comments are exaggerated.⁹⁸⁶ If Robert Guiscard's army was indeed huge in size, then why did they not choose to march against Thessaloniki, the second largest and wealthiest city-port of the Empire, as they had done three years ago? Instead, they turned south-eastwards, towards Corinth, Athens and Thebes, cities that belonged to the poorly defended themes of Hellas and Peloponnesus.

Meanwhile, Alexius went on to ensure that the last enclaves of Norman military presence in the Balkans were wiped out. Avlona, as we have already seen, was captured soon after Bohemond's departure in the spring of 1084, while in the same period, a combined Venetian and Byzantine⁹⁸⁷ fleet attacked the citadel of Corfu, since the lower city and the rest of the island had rebelled against the Normans.⁹⁸⁸ But this expedition failed to dislodge the Normans from the well-fortified citadel. Alexius seems to have been aware of Robert's preparations, and sometime during the summer he requested Venice's naval assistance to defend the Illyrian coastline, since a Venetian squadron was already active there by the time the Normans crossed to Avlona.⁹⁸⁹

At the end of September/early October, Robert Guiscard departed from Brindisi after having sent his two sons Roger and Guy with a reconnaissance force of knights to capture

⁹⁸⁶ *Alexiad*, VI. v, pp. 281-82; Sewter, p. 188; *Gesta*, V. 127-156, pp. 242-44.

⁹⁸⁷ Again, the leader of the Byzantine squadron was Mavrikas.

⁹⁸⁸ *Gesta*, V. 96-105, pp. 240-42.

⁹⁸⁹ *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 283; Sewter, p. 189.

Avlona.⁹⁹⁰ The Normans occupied the town and they joined up with the main expeditionary force somewhere between Avlona and Butrinto, probably close to the *castra* of Hiericho and Kanina as three years ago. William of Apulia, much better informed about this part of the Norman campaign, talks about a weather system that forced the Normans to remain in their base near Butrinto for the next two months, not being able to sail to Corfu to raise the siege of the city's citadel.⁹⁹¹ Around the end of November/early December, Robert Guiscard took his army across to the island of Corfu, landing at the northern port of Cassiopi just like he had done in 1081.⁹⁹² The only difference this time was that he found a joined Venetian-Byzantine fleet waiting to attack him.

We are not informed about the number of ships that were sent by the Doge, but we should not expect a large expeditionary force since it only took the Venetians a few weeks to prepare and sail south.⁹⁹³ Both William of Apulia and Anna Comnena use vague terms like *triremes* and *naves* to describe the consistency of the Venetian fleet, although by reading the *Alexiad* we understand that both large vessels, like *chelandia* or types of *dromons*, and lighter and faster ships, like the *galeai*, would have been deployed.⁹⁹⁴ As for the Byzantine navy's numbers and types of ships, it is most likely that it was the same squadron that faced the Normans in 1081, judging by the presence of the same admiral, Mavrikas.⁹⁹⁵ What is most interesting about William's narrative is that, for the first time, he mentions the term *chelandia* to describe the types of ships of the Byzantine fleet, contrary to the term *naves* for the Venetian ships of the 1081 naval battles. Since we know that Mavrikas' fleet is highly unlikely to have been reinforced by newly built ships during the years 1082-4, we can say

⁹⁹⁰ Malaterra, 3. 40; *Gesta*, V. 143-53, p. 244; Anna erroneously reports Otranto as the point of departure: *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 283; Sewter, pp. 188-9.

⁹⁹¹ *Gesta*, V. 147-49, p. 244.

⁹⁹² *Alexiad*, VI. v, pp. 282-83; Sewter, p. 189; *Gesta*, V. 156-159, p. 244.

⁹⁹³ "They [Venetians] had not been long in the harbour of Passaron before they heard of his [Guiscard's] move." *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 283; Sewter, p. 189.

⁹⁹⁴ *Alexiad*, VI. v, pp. 283-84; Sewter, pp. 189-90.

⁹⁹⁵ *Gesta*, V. 99, p. 240.

that the Normans faced chelandia in 1081 as well. The fact, however, that he identifies the Norman ships as triremes is completely wrong, because he writes that “Robert Guiscard’s *naves* were seen as inferior by the Venetians, who attacked them”.⁹⁹⁶

We follow the writings of the *Alexiad*, our most detailed source for these three naval battles.⁹⁹⁷ Before the Norman crossing to Corfu, the Venetians had established their headquarters in the harbour of Passaron, close to Cassiopi in the north-eastern side of the island. During their first encounter, the Venetians managed to rout the Norman squadron, but Anna gives us few if any details about the course of the battle. Three days later the allied fleet attacked the Normans once more, trying to inflict a significant blow upon the relatively small Norman squadron of warships, but again their victory was not decisive enough to force Robert Guiscard to retreat back to Avlona. This time, however, the Venetians made the grave mistake of underestimating the enemy’s losses and, almost certain about their crushing victory, they sent envoys to their Doge in Venice to announce the news. With the Venetian small and fast ships sent back home, the Normans attacked their enemies.⁹⁹⁸ Their assault was certainly not expected by the Venetians⁹⁹⁹ who barely had the time to tie their ships together and form the *pelagolimena*, the defensive formation seen three years before at Dyrrachium. The Norman ships, being made much lighter the day before, took full advantage of their speed and mobility and overwhelmingly defeated the Venetians.

Both Anna Comnena and William of Apulia report large numbers of dead and prisoners. Anna mentions around 13,000 Venetian casualties, surely an exaggerated figure which

⁹⁹⁶ “Roberti naves dum conspicit inferiores esse suis”: *Gesta*, V. 163-164, p. 244; *inferiores* means inferior in quality than in numbers.

⁹⁹⁷ *Alexiad*, VI. v-vi, pp. 283-87; Sewter, pp. 189-91; See also: *Gesta*, V. 147-198, pp. 244-6; Dandolo, *Chronicon*, s.a. 1084, p. 218; Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1084; *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1085; Romuald of Salerno, s.a. 1085.

⁹⁹⁸ Anna tells us that Guiscard was given this information by a certain Venetian called Pietro Contarini, probably a member of the powerful Contarini family: *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 284; Sewter, p. 190; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 50-67.

⁹⁹⁹ William of Apulia tells us that the Byzantine squadron had left the scene of the naval battle: *Gesta*, V. 186-7, p. 246.

reflects, however, the serious blow to Venice's prestige, and 2,500 prisoners who were probably sent back to Avlona.¹⁰⁰⁰ Lupus Protospatharius talks about more than a thousand men killed in action, five ships captured by the Normans and two which were sunk with their entire crew, a much more realistic estimate for the Venetian casualties.¹⁰⁰¹ However, it is only in the *Alexiad* where we get an idea of the way in which the Venetian prisoners were treated by Robert Guiscard: "Unfortunately Robert behaved in cruel fashion after his famous victory. Many of the prisoners were treated with hideous savagery: some were blinded, others had their noses cut off, and others lost hands or feet or both."¹⁰⁰² There was no precedent in Robert Guiscard's behaviour against prisoners of war, neither at Dyrrachium three years ago nor against the Bariots, the Palermitans or the people of Naples in the 1070s. Probably the Duke wished to send a warning to the Venetians never to launch another naval campaign against his army. A similar pattern was followed by Roger after the battle of Misilmeri (1068), when hardly any Muslim survived to bring the news to the inhabitants of the Sicilian capital. Instead, the Normans used carrier-pigeons, supposedly writing the notes with the blood of the dead Muslim soldiers. This gruesome method of psychological warfare proved very effective, with Malaterra reporting: "When the people of Palermo heard the news, the whole city was shaken: the tearful voices of the children and women rose up through the air to the heavens."¹⁰⁰³

By mid-December 1084, Robert Guiscard was free to sail southwards and relieve the besieged Norman garrison of the Corfiot citadel. Later, he returned to his winter quarters on the banks of the river Glykys (Acheron) in the Epirotic coastline to spend the winter, with himself and his elite cavalry pitching a camp further south at Vonitsa, the town which they had captured in a side-expedition three years ago.¹⁰⁰⁴ Meanwhile, famine and an outbreak,

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 285; Sewter, p. 190; *Gesta*, V. 193-197, p. 246.

¹⁰⁰¹ Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1084.

¹⁰⁰² *Alexiad*, VI. v, p. 285; Sewter, p. 190.

¹⁰⁰³ Malaterra, 2. 41, 42.

¹⁰⁰⁴ *Gesta*, V. 202-209, p. 246

probably of malaria, had swept his army and claimed, according to both Anna and William of Apulia, some 10,000 men of whom 500 were knights – another exaggerated figure.¹⁰⁰⁵ This disease though would certainly have had a demoralising effect on the men and officers of the army, especially if we consider the fact that even Bohemond requested to return to Italy for treatment.¹⁰⁰⁶

While examining Robert Guiscard's conquest in the Illyrian and Greek mainland and the islands of the Ionian Sea, it is imperative that we should keep a careful watch on a detailed map in order to note down these initial conquests. This would make much easier and sensible the tracking down of Guiscard's next moves, bearing in mind his long-term goal which was the cities of Athens, Corinth and Thebes. In sailing from the straits of Otranto the main trunk routes that a medieval fleet could take, heading southwards towards the island of Crete through the west coast of the Peloponnesus, laid inshore of the islands of Corfu, Cephalonia, Zante, due to the prevailing north-westerly winds, and Modon in the south-western tip of Peloponnesus.¹⁰⁰⁷ However, if a fleet targeted the areas of Attica, Corinth and Boeotia, it was better to sail east passing Patras, Naupaktos, through the Gulf of Corinth and land a raiding party off the coasts of Corinth than sail all the way around the Peloponnesus. Thus far, he had managed to subjugate the port of Avlona and the island of Corfu as his main supply bases, and having established himself at Vonitsa, in the entrance of the Amvrakikos Gulf he had under his control the sea-routes half-way to the entrance of the Gulf of Corinth. His next step would have been to subdue the island of Cephalonia, which was the capital of the coastal thema of Cephalonia which included the seven islands of the Ionian Sea.

In the early summer of 1085 Robert Guiscard sent his son Roger Borsa, along with a small force of elite troops, to Cephalonia in an attempt to capture the island's capital *Agios*

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Gesta*, V. 210-220, pp. 246-8; Anna erroneously puts the outbreak of the disease in the first campaign of 1081: *Alexiad*, IV. iii, p. 196; Sewter, pp. 139-40.

¹⁰⁰⁶ *Gesta*, V. 223-225, p. 248.

¹⁰⁰⁷ See: Pryor, *Geography, Technology and War*, pp. 12-24, 87-101, especially the map in p. 14 which puts down the sea-currents, the trunk routes and prevailing winds in the Mediterranean.

Georgios.¹⁰⁰⁸ At first, Roger proved unsuccessful in his siege of the town and it was Robert Guiscard who arrived to take command of the operations, landing at the promontory of Atheras in the north-west of the island. William of Apulia and Anna Comnena give slightly different version of what actually happened next. According to the *Alexiad*, Robert Guiscard arrived in a single *galea* at the promontory of Atheras, in order to take command of the operations against the island's capital, while the rest of his army remained on the opposite Epirotic coast, in battle positions ready to sail and bring reinforcements if necessary. He had not sent for the rest of his army to embark for Cephalonia, and before he even managed to reach his son, Robert Guiscard fell ill "by a violent fever".¹⁰⁰⁹ William of Apulia tells us that the Duke, after sending his son to besiege the town of Agios Georgios, returned to Vonitsa to take his entire army across the sea and march against the island's capital. He embarked from the Norman base-camp heading for Cephalonia, but "before he managed to see the castles-fortifications [of Agios Georgios] he went down with fever".¹⁰¹⁰

Robert Guiscard died on the 17th July 1085, after suffering from intense fever for six days in an area which retains until the present day the Norman Duke's name in the form of *Fiskardo* (former *Panormos*).¹⁰¹¹ Although a historian of medicine might give a better explanation concerning the Duke's cause of death, the most likely illness that brought his life to an end so rapidly and, indeed, unexpectedly must have been malaria. As we have already

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Alexiad*, VI. vi, p. 287; Sewter, pp. 191-2; *Gesta*, V. 228-232, p. 248; the Byzantine castle of the island's capital was probably built in the eleventh century and formed the most important settlement nucleus on the island and the seat of the governor: *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, pp. 58-61; for the topography of Cephalonia, see: D. Zakythenos, "Κεφαλληνίας ιστορικά και τοπωνυμικά", *Επετηρίς Εταιρείας Βυζαντινών Σπουδών*, 6 (1929).

¹⁰⁰⁹ *Alexiad*, VI. vi, pp. 287-88; Sewter, pp. 191-2.

¹⁰¹⁰ "Navim conscendes, quam castra revisere possit, febre prius capitur": *Gesta*, V. 288-289, p. 252.

¹⁰¹¹ For the two other locations which "claim" Guiscard's death, see: A. Savvides, *Τα Βυζαντινά Επτάνησα, 11^{ος}-αρχές 13^{ου} αι. Το ναυτικό θέμα Κεφαλληνίας στην Υστεροβυζαντινή περίοδο*, Athens, 1986.

seen, the Norman camp was struck by a violent disease that cost the lives of thousands of men, both foot-soldiers and knights, and although the figures provided by our chroniclers may seem to be exaggerated, they certainly reveal the severity of the situation. Malaria¹⁰¹² is a vector-borne infectious disease caused by parasites, which is transmitted by an already infected person to another through a mosquito-bite. Its most typical symptoms are fever, chills, nausea and flu-like illness, which they certainly match what was described by Anna Comnena and William of Apulia of a violent fever that killed Robert Guiscard in just six days. Since the mosquitoes re-produce in large numbers in cool and humid places, Vonitsa in the extremely humid Amvrakian Gulf must have been the worst place Robert Guiscard could have picked to pitch his winter camp.

The consequences of Guiscard's death for the Norman campaign were disastrous. Roger Borsa, the legitimate heir to the Dukedom of Apulia and Calabria since 1081,¹⁰¹³ took advantage of the absence of his older half-brother Bohemond to arrange for his succession and win over the allegiance of his father's high-ranking vassals. He immediately called for a meeting of all the Counts that were camped at Vonitsa and demanded an oath of fealty to him in person, before sailing to Apulia to assume the command of his dukedom. However, the most significant consequence of Robert Guiscard's death was the Byzantine capture of Dyrrachium, the last remaining outpost of Norman military presence in the east side of the Adriatic Sea since the spring of 1082. Alexius once again set in motion the mechanisms of Byzantine diplomacy and, as Anna writes, "to sow dissension among them [Normans] by letters and every other method. He also persuaded the Venetians resident in Constantinople to write to their fellow-countrymen in Epidamnos, and to the Amalfitans and all other foreigners there, advising them to yield to his [Alexius'] wishes and surrender the place. Unceasingly,

¹⁰¹² For more information about malaria, see the World Health Organization's website: <http://www.who.int/malaria/> .

¹⁰¹³ *Gesta*, IV. 195-97, p. 214; Roger had already been recognised as heir by Robert Guiscard's vassals since the spring of 1073. See: Amatus, VII. 20.

with bribes and promises, he works to this end”.¹⁰¹⁴ As for the Venetians of the lower city, the fact that he used their countrymen at Constantinople as intermediaries makes it quite likely that even more privileges and future trading agreements would have been promised to them in addition to the 1082 and 1084 chrysobulls. The Normans were eventually “persuaded” by the inhabitants of the lower city, the Venetians, and surrendered the city to Alexius’ officers.¹⁰¹⁵ The surrender of the city must have taken place in the late autumn of the year 1085.¹⁰¹⁶

¹⁰¹⁴ *Alexiad*, VI. vi, p. 289; Sewter, pp. 192-3.

¹⁰¹⁵ *Alexiad*, VI. vi, pp. 289-90; Sewter, pp. 289-90; *Gesta*, V. 377-390, p. 256

¹⁰¹⁶ *Alexiad*, VI. viii, p. 295; Sewter, p. 196; see also: Buckler, *Anna Comnena*, p. 39; Savvides’ erroneous dating is striking: Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica*, pp. 68-9.

11. Bohemond of Taranto and the First Crusade

The main objective of this chapter is not to provide a military history of the First Crusade¹⁰¹⁷ but rather to establish a link between Bohemond's military achievements in Illyria and Greece in the 1080s and his following invasion of 1107. Thus the two major questions will be: what was Bohemond's role in the First Crusade? What experience did he acquire while fighting against Turkish troops in Asia Minor and Syria which would seem useful ten years later?

None of the contemporary chroniclers give an exact estimate of the size of Bohemond's followers for the First Crusade, with Albert of Aachen writing about 10,000 cavalry and "very many troops of infantry", a greatly exaggerated figure.¹⁰¹⁸ Lupus Protospatharius' 500 knights sound more realistic, a number which confirms that the "Italian" Norman contingent was, indeed, one of the smallest in the crusading army.¹⁰¹⁹ If we assume that the infantry would have been between five and seven times the size of the cavalry, then a number of 2,500-3,500 would have been reasonable, if we include Tancred's contingent.¹⁰²⁰ Additionally, we have a list of the counts that followed Bohemond in his expedition, namely his nephew Tancred, Richard of Principate and his brother Rainulf, Humphrey of

¹⁰¹⁷ Key studies on the history of the First Crusade are: France, *Victory in the East*; S. Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, 3 vols., Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1951-54; C. Tyerman, *God's War, a New History of the Crusades*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 2006; J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the idea of crusading*, Athlone, London, 1986; idem, *The Crusades*, Athlone, London, 1987.

¹⁰¹⁸ Albert of Aachen, II. 18, p. 88; Albert was a contemporary of the events of the First Crusade and wrote his account based on oral testimonies of the participants.

¹⁰¹⁹ Lupus Protospatharius, s.a. 1096; *Alexiad*, X. xi, vol. II, p. 60; Sewter, p. 326; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, p. 36; Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, p. 22.

¹⁰²⁰ Tancred had a contingent of 2,000 men: *Gesta Francorum et aliorum Hierosolimitanorum, The deeds of the Franks and the other pilgrims to Jerusalem*, ed. R. Hill, Nelson, London, 1962, iv, p. 9.

Montescaglioso and nine others.¹⁰²¹ What is very important in this case is the presence of Richard and Humphrey, the two most powerful and influential Apulian magnates after Roger Borsa himself, even though it is almost impossible to estimate the size of their contingents.

Some of the facts about Bohemond's army can explain why the count of Taranto quickly became the leading figure in the First Crusade. The Norman army consisted of many hybrid elements like any crusading army of the period, but we must admit that the Normans were the most experienced for what was lying ahead of them. A significant number of their experienced knights had faced the Byzantines in battle several times, from Bari (1071) to Dyrrachium (1081-4). During the Sicilian expansion they had been facing Muslim armies and Bohemond had fought against Turcoples during his first campaign against Dyrrachium fifteen years ago. Further, if we are to believe the author of the *Historia Belli Sacri*, a monk at Montecassino writing in the 1130s who seems to be well informed on south Italian affairs of the period, both Tancred and Richard of Principate and possibly a large number of their followers knew Arabic,¹⁰²² something extremely rare for the armies of the First Crusade. Also, it is highly likely that Bohemond himself spoke Greek, something which can explain his advantage over the other Latin leaders in their dealings with Alexius, his representatives and the number of Greek merchants that they encountered during the crusade.

Bohemond entered Constantinople on the 17 April 1097,¹⁰²³ taking the oath of homage which the Emperor had demanded from him and from all the other leaders before him.¹⁰²⁴ In

¹⁰²¹ *Gesta Francorum*, iii, p. 8; William of Tyre, vol. I, Book II, XIII, p. 134; William of Tyre is writing in the 1170s and largely copies the contemporary chroniclers of the First Crusade.

¹⁰²² *Historia Belli Sacri*, R.H.C. Oc., vol. 67, p. 198; for the spread of the Arabic culture and language in Sicily up to the 1060s, see: Metcalfe, "The Muslims of Sicily under Christian Rule", 289-317, especially 289-93.

¹⁰²³ For the date see: H. Hagenmeyer, *Die Kreuzzugbriefe aus den Jahren 1088-1100*, Innsbruck, 1901, pp. 64-5; J. W. Nesbitt, "The Rate of March of Crusading Armies in Europe, a Study and Computation", *Traditio*, 19 (1963), 167-81.

¹⁰²⁴ *Alexiad*, X. xi, vol. II, pp. 63-6; Sewter, pp. 328-9; for Alexius' dealings with Bohemond, see: J. Shepard, "When Greek meets Greek: Alexius Comnenus and Bohemond in 1097-98", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 12 (1988), 189ff.

order to proceed inland in Asia Minor it was imperative that the crusaders should first take Nicaea, a city which effectively controlled all the roads leading to the Anatolian plateau and situated only 40 kilometres from Constantinople.¹⁰²⁵ The crusading armies needed provisions in order to besiege the city effectively and it was at this stage of the crusade when we can see for the first time the significant role played by Bohemond in the campaign, since he was the leader who managed to negotiate sufficient supplies to be sent to Nicomedia.¹⁰²⁶ The siege of Nicaea begun on the 14th May and lasted about five weeks, mostly due to the crusaders' difficulty in organizing an efficient blockade of the city.¹⁰²⁷ During the siege the crusaders managed to repel a Seljuc relief force of around 10,000 men in a battle that took place in the vicinity of the city and a key role was played by Bohemond's troops and the Germans who supported the contingent of the Provençals on the south side of the city.¹⁰²⁸ And it was a combination of the sheer size of the Crusader force and the confined space that did not allow the Turks to fully develop their encircling tactics, thus forcing Kilij-Arslan to retreat from the vicinity. Once the defenders realized that they had no hope of being rescued, they decided to surrender, not to the crusaders, but to the Imperial unit that was besieging them from the side of the lake.¹⁰²⁹

¹⁰²⁵ About the Turkish Emirates established in Asia Minor in the 1090s, see: Korobeinikov, "The Turks", 692-710.

¹⁰²⁶ *Gesta Francorum*, vii, p. 14.

¹⁰²⁷ *Alexiad*, XI. i, vol. II, pp. 69-82; Sewter, pp. 333-40; William of Tyre, vol. I, Book III, I, pp. 152-3, 165-6; Albert of Aachen, II. 37, p. 126; Le "Liber" de Raymond d'Aguilers, ed. J. Hugh and L.L. Hill, Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1969, pp. 39-47; Raymond D'Aguilers, *Historia Francorum Qui Ceperunt Iherusalem*, tr. J.H. Hill and L.Hill, The American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1968, pp. 25-29; regarding the numbers of the crusaders gathered at Nicaea, see: Fulcherius Carnotensis, pp. 181-3, 186; Ekkehardus Uraugiensis abbas, *Hierosolymita*, ed. H. Hagenmeyer, Tubingen, 1877, p. 21; The most detailed accounts on the siege of Nicaea are: France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 143-69; R. Rogers, *Latin Siege Warfare in the Twelfth Century*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1992, pp. 16-25.

¹⁰²⁸ For a detailed analysis of this battle, see: France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 160-62.

¹⁰²⁹ Batumites, the general with a force of 2,000 men acting under Alexius' orders, had secretly negotiated with the Seljuks. See: *Alexiad*, XI. ii, vol. II, p. 77; Sewter, pp. 337-8;

The huge crusader army that had gathered at Nicaea marched south towards Doryleum in two groups of divisions, obviously to keep up with the supply and baggage trains and for better defence against possible enemy attacks, with Bohemond in the head of the first group of armies.¹⁰³⁰ The Latin armies' formation in the eleventh and twelfth century was usually a column which included flank-guards and rear and/or vanguard depending on the prudence of the commanding general.¹⁰³¹ After leaving behind the Bithynian Mountains and coming into central Anatolia they found themselves in a broken country with no easily defensible positions and very well-suited for the particular tactics of the Seljucs. Thus, on the morning of the 31st June, Bohemond deployed his forces in front of a marsh¹⁰³², which might have provided some safety from the Turkish encircling manoeuvres, left the infantry to guard the baggage train and ordered the cavalry to stand in a dense mass and hold the line. We have no credible account about the numbers involved in this first clash between the crusaders and the Seljucs and an attempt to make an estimate would certainly be futile.¹⁰³³ However, Fulcher of Chartres and the *Gesta* give an estimate of 360,000 Seljuc troops, while William of Tyre narrows it down to 200,000, which are surely exaggerated figures. France has suggested that the Seljuc army was smaller than the force of the Crusaders and it would have been roughly equal to the total mounted host of the Latins, thus a battle of movement would nullify the

Gesta Francorum, viii, pp. 16-7; William of Tyre, vol. I, Book III, XI, pp. 165-66; Albert of Aachen, II. 37, p. 126.

¹⁰³⁰ *Gesta Francorum*, ix, p. 18; Albert of Aachen, II. 38, p. 128; *Alexiad*, XI. iii, vol. II, p. 84; Sewter, pp. 341-2.

¹⁰³¹ For a good introductory study on this topic, see: Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 60-70; compare with Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 154-66.

¹⁰³² Fulcherius Carnotensis, book I, XI. 3.

¹⁰³³ *Gesta Francorum*, ix, p. 20; William of Tyre, vol. I, Book III, XIII, p. 170; France argues, based on Cahen's conclusions about the Turkish settlement in Anatolia in the previous decades, that Kilij-Arslan would not have been able to gather more than 10,000 troops. See: France, *Victory in the East*, p. 157; Cahen, "The Turkish invasion: the Selchukids", 135-76.

numeric advantage of the latter by attacking their vanguard.¹⁰³⁴ And this time Kilij-Arslan chose the approaches of a high plateau to ambush the Latin vanguard, a less confined space in comparison to his attack against the Provençals at Nicaea.¹⁰³⁵

Before the crusaders had the chance to be fully deployed in their battle formations, the Seljuks arrived en masse and attacked the westerners from all directions in an attempt to encircle them. They applied their usual steppe tactics of releasing constant showers of arrows from a distance and falling back when their enemies would charge forward to neutralize them, but then pretending to retreat they would make a sudden turn and come back to harass them. The pace and agility of their horses was quicker and more manoeuvrable than the Frankish cavalry, mostly due to their equipment which was significantly lighter, although the horses themselves did not differ much from those used in Islam by the end of the century.¹⁰³⁶ Their principal weapon was the bow, but they were also carrying a small round wooden shield, a lance and a sword. As for their armour, it is very difficult to know what they were wearing as defensive equipment in the later decades of the eleventh century. But the influence from the Byzantines was becoming strong and already since the Crusade the chroniclers mention heavily armed knights with hauberks. There is significant evidence to show that all these were much lighter than the western European ones.¹⁰³⁷ Their aim was to confuse and demoralise the enemy, isolate and break-up their formations before charging in with their

¹⁰³⁴ France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 174-75. France also draws an interesting comparison of Doryleum with Myriokephalo (1176).

¹⁰³⁵ Ibn-al-Qalanisi, *The Damascus Chronicle of the Crusades*, extracted and translated by H.A.R. Gibb, Luzac & Co, London, 1932, pp. 41-42.

¹⁰³⁶ J. France, "Technology and the Success of the First Crusade", *War and Society in the Eastern Mediterranean*, 165.

¹⁰³⁷ Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, pp. 77-8; France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 148-49, 204-5; idem, "Technology and the First Crusade", 169; A. Ayton, "Arms, Armour, and Horses", *Medieval Warfare*, 190, 192-3; D. Nicolle, "The Impact of European Couched Lance on Muslim Military Tradition", *Journal of the Arms & Armour Society*, 10 (1980), 13. Nicolle also mentions the very useful illustrations of a mid-eleventh century Turkish manuscript named *Warqa-wa-Gulshah*.

swords and lances.¹⁰³⁸ As most of our Latin sources agree, these steppe tactics were completely unknown to the crusaders – apart from Bohemond of course – who certainly must not have fought against any large Seljuc force before.¹⁰³⁹ Taticius, a Turk in the service of the Emperor was accompanying the crusaders with a force of about 2,000 light cavalry and Alexius had given advice on how to deal with the attacks of the Turks on the battlefield,¹⁰⁴⁰ but it is rather doubtful that any Byzantine advice would have been applied properly at Doryleum.

The first stage of the battle found the crusaders completely enveloped by the Seljuc cavalry. And this would have been exactly Kiliç Arslan's main strategic objective, as he had attacked – or ambushed might be a better term – the Latins at a relatively narrow point where two valleys meet.¹⁰⁴¹ Although there was no main body which Bohemond could order to advance, an attempt was made by the Frankish cavalry to counterattack, probably a spontaneous reaction to the shower of arrows, “but the Turks ... purposely opened their ranks to avoid the clash, and the Christians, finding no one to oppose them, had to fall back deceived.”¹⁰⁴² They soon realised that any sallies forward would accomplish nothing and the crusaders resorted to closing in their ranks and holding the line. Smail insisted that this was the best action they could take, because this mass “represented a formidable defensive power”, while Oman argued that “this passive policy only made them more helpless prey to the Turks.”¹⁰⁴³ I would have to agree with the latter opinion because, since we know that the Latin foot did not have the equipment or training and discipline of the Roman *testudo* to hold

¹⁰³⁸ Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, pp. 75-83; Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 206-19, 273-4; France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 147-9.

¹⁰³⁹ *Gesta Francorum*, ix, p. 19; Fulcherius Carnotensis, pp. 194-95; William of Tyre, vol. I, Book III, XIV, pp. 170-1; Albert of Aachen, II. 39, p. 130; excluding the several Latin mercenaries serving the Emperors since the mid-eleventh century, as we have already seen.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Alexiad*, X. xi, vol. II, pp. 67-8; Sewter, pp. 329-31.

¹⁰⁴¹ For the topography of the region, by far the most detailed study is: France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 173-75.

¹⁰⁴² William of Tyre, vol. I, Book III, XIV, pp. 171.

¹⁰⁴³ Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p. 169; Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, p. 274.

back enemy volleys of arrows, then staying idle would not have been the best choice. It was only when they had gained greater experience on the battlefield after Antioch, as I mention later, that they became a cohesive and effective fighting force.

At this crucial stage of the battle, when Bohemond's battle group was in danger of being completely cut off, the latter sent an urgent message to Godfrey and the rest of the armies of the second group (only the knights) arrived just in time to save the day, forming their lines on the right of Bohemond's battle-group.¹⁰⁴⁴ Once the crusaders had crossed the mountain ridge that led to the battlefield they did not waste any time forming a front but immediately charged upon the surprised and frustrated Seljuks, mainly focusing on their left flank and centre, forcing them to flee.¹⁰⁴⁵ Contrary to what advice Alexius had given to them, the crusaders pursued the defeated foe for many hours, thus preventing them from regrouping and taking large amounts of booty from their camp.

The first encounter of the crusaders with a relatively unknown enemy to them resulted to a complete victory. But this was a victory of chance and, although it was one of the rare cases when the Westerners enjoyed numerical superiority over their enemies, it was in no way due to the superior battle-tactics applied by the crusaders or the mistakes made by the Seljuks. If the messengers sent by Bohemond to Godfrey had not made it through the Seljuk lines, or if the Latin reinforcements had not arrived on time, things would certainly have been very different. Most likely the armies of Bohemond and Robert of Normandy would have been cut to pieces or forced to a disorderly retreat, something which Kilij-Arslan was hoping for. But in the crisis moment, when the crusaders' front was ready to collapse, religious fervour kicked in: "Stand fast all together, trusting in Christ and in the Victory of the Holy Cross. Today, please God, you will all gain much booty."¹⁰⁴⁶ Undoubtedly, this first battle experience would prove very useful to the crusaders because it taught them several valuable

¹⁰⁴⁴ See the map on: France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 178-79.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Gesta Francorum*, ix, p. 20; William of Tyre, vol. I, Book III, XV, pp. 171-3; Albert of Aachen, II. 41, pp. 132-4.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Gesta Francorum*, ix, pp. 19-20.

lessons about steppe warfare. They witnessed firsthand the thick formations of mounted archers attacking them from all sides, using the mobility of their horses to attack both the front and rear of their units, constantly employing the tactic of feigned retreat, not just in large divisions but in smaller units as well. They were able to combine all the above with their archery which, according to many contemporary chroniclers, was deadly accurate aiming not just at the men but at their horses as well. The heavy Frankish cavalry's battle formations and its cooperation with the still inexperienced masses of infantry proved a tactical failure against the mounted troops of the Seljuks.

The crusaders might have been lucky outside the walls of Nicaea, but Antioch was one of the most heavily defended cities of the Empire that combined a strong natural position, while on the most exposed sides it was surrounded by double walls which were said to be wide enough for a chariot to ride on the battlements.¹⁰⁴⁷ As they were to find out soon enough, there were three ways to subdue the city – either by starvation, treachery or by a trick.¹⁰⁴⁸ The two major problems for the crusaders during the winter months were the provision of food and other supplies for the army and to prevent the increase of desertion among its ranks.¹⁰⁴⁹ Logistics were crucial at this point of the campaign, and the task of bringing supplies to the crusader army was taken over by Bohemond who held foraging expeditions in the region of Antioch during the winter (1097/8) and attempted to neutralize several smaller garrisons in the area that were harassing the crusaders.

¹⁰⁴⁷ For an exhaustive account on the siege, see: Runciman, *A History of the Crusades*, vol. I, pp. 213-36; Flori, *Bohémond d' Antioch*, pp. 133-42; our main primary sources for the siege are: Raymond d'Aguilers, pp. 47-64/Hill and Hill, pp. 30-64; Albert of Aachen, III. 38 – V. 1, pp. 198-338; William of Tyre, Book IV, 12-24, Book V, Book VI, pp. 206-297; *Gesta Francorum*, xii-xxix, pp. 28-71; for the city's defences: G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria*, Princeton, 1961, pp. 528-52; Rogers, *Latin Siege Warfare*, pp. 26-30.

¹⁰⁴⁸ In 969, a daring party of Byzantine soldiers scaled the walls of Antioch using ladders while the Muslim guards were asleep. See: Leo the Deacon, pp. 81-2; *The History of Leo the Deacon*, pp. 132-4.

¹⁰⁴⁹ For an examination of how serious a factor desertion and diseases were for a medieval army, see: France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 134-7.

Supplies for the Latins were supposed to be provided by the Byzantines naval bases in Cilicia and Cyprus,¹⁰⁵⁰ but in a hostile area like Syria and so far from the rest of the Byzantine centres it was apparent that an alternative supply source had to be found. Even though the crusaders officially chose Stephen of Blois as their leader,¹⁰⁵¹ the active role for this task was taken by Bohemond who did everything within his power to look like the leader of this operation.¹⁰⁵² His strategic thinking, high morale and his resourcefulness certainly greatly helped him. He led numerous foraging expeditions further inland and towards the port of St-Symeon and he was involved in numerous skirmishes with the Turks, one of them developing into a small-scale battle with a Seljuc force from the castle of Harem,¹⁰⁵³ a constant source of harassment some three hours to the east of Antioch, in the middle of November (1097).¹⁰⁵⁴

By the end of the winter, Bohemond would have the chance to lead a cavalry force against a large relief party sent by the Seljuks and ambush it, thus demonstrating his resourcefulness and strategic thinking. The Seljuks under Ridwan of Aleppo, Malik-Shah I's (1072-92) son, had managed to gather a large force of about 12,000 to 28,000 men to inflict a blow to the besiegers of Antioch. A smaller expedition had already been launched by Duqaq of Damascus, another of Malik Shah's sons, in late December but it brought poor results and

¹⁰⁵⁰ For the role of the Byzantine Navy in supplying the crusaders, see: B.S. Bachrach, "Some observations on the role of the Byzantine navy in the success of the First Crusade", *The Journal of Medieval Military History*, 1 (2002), 83-100.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Gesta Francorum*, xxvii, p. 63.

¹⁰⁵² It is possible that his ambitions caused Taticius' departure from Antioch later in February (1098). For the debate, see: Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, pp. 57-62; Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, pp. 200-5; Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, pp. 34-7; J. France, "The Departure of Tatikius from the Crusader Army", *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 44 (1971), 137-47; Shepard, "When Greek meets Greek", 193ff.

¹⁰⁵³ France, *Victory in the East*, p. 208.

¹⁰⁵⁴ For the harassment by the Turkish garrisons: Raymond d'Aguilers, pp. 48-49/Hill and Hill, pp. 31-32; Fulcherius Carnotensis, pp. 215-24; *Gesta Francorum*, xii, p. 29; Albert of Aachen, III. 59, p. 230.

was dealt with by Bohemond and Robert of Flanders.¹⁰⁵⁵ We need to point out here that there is a difference between these troops and the Turks who had engaged the crusaders at Doryleum. The forces that Duqaq, Ridwan and later the governor of Mosul, Kerbogha, put in the field were composite armies of Arabs, Seljuks and probably other nationalities like the Iranian Daylami, the Kurds and other Bedouin tribes,¹⁰⁵⁶ and in which the Seljuks were the dominant party, but Kilij-Arslan's army was almost entirely Turkish.¹⁰⁵⁷ The news of their mobilization quickly alerted the crusader leaders, mainly Bohemond who was effectively the leader, and a force of every available knight was raised and sent out to face the Turks. By that time the horses which would have survived the march through Anatolia would not have been more than 1,000 and so we can presume that this would have been the number of the mobilised Frankish knights.¹⁰⁵⁸ Bohemond decided to pursue an aggressive strategy and ambush the Seljuks on a narrow neck of land which passes between the Lake Bengras and the River Orontes, some eleven kilometres east of Antioch. His other option would have been to wait for the Seljuks on the Iron Bridge that led to Antioch, where Bohemond could have made better use of his infantry units. But the size of Ridwan's army quickly led to the crusaders taking the initiative. When Bohemond saw the vanguard of the Seljuk army thrown out in front of the main body in their disorderly fashion, Bohemond kept waiting until most

¹⁰⁵⁵ France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 237-41.

¹⁰⁵⁶ For the employment of these groups by the Abbasids, the Fatimids and the Hamdanids in the ninth and tenth centuries, see: McGeer, *Sowing the Dragon's Teeth*, pp. 229-42; Beshir, "Fatimid Military Organization", 37-56; Hamblin, "The Fatimid Army"; Lev, *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt; War and society in the eastern Mediterranean*; "Infantry in Muslim armies during the Crusades", 185-206; Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. II, pp. 19-193.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Some of the Latin chroniclers could understand this difference and use different terms, like Turks and Saracens. See: Albert of Aachen, III. 62, p. 236; V. 29, p. 374; *Gesta Francorum*, ix, p. 20; xvii, pp. 35-7.

¹⁰⁵⁸ On how we arrive to this number, see: Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, p. 280; Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, p. 28; idem, *The Idea of Crusading*, pp. 64-5; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 225-27; Nicolle puts the figure down to 200, see: Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, p. 137.

of the main body was inside the defile and then launched his attack. He had deployed his forces in five divisions, keeping a sixth in reserve which he commanded himself, a tactic which would be followed against the relieving army from Mosul in the following June. When the Latins were beginning to give ground to the repeated attacks of the Turks it was this reserve division that gave the final blow. Most of the Turks who were lured into this ambush were killed and Bohemond returned triumphant in his camp (8th-9th February 1098).¹⁰⁵⁹

The outcome of this battle is extremely significant because it is the first time that we see Bohemond pursuing an aggressive strategy and setting an ambush on a large Seljuc force. He had seen firsthand at Doryleum how difficult it was for the Frankish cavalry to resist the encircling manoeuvres and the showers of arrows of the Seljuc cavalry and so he decided to take the initiative himself. He used the topography of the region in his favour, choosing a narrow ground where the Seljucs would not have had the space to perform their usual encircling tactics, quite likely influenced by the outcome of the battle at Nicaea, thus they would have been trapped more easily by the few hundred horsemen he had brought with him. Once he managed to get his cavalry in close contact with their enemies, the Turks were no match for the superior Frankish chivalry. In addition, we see Bohemond keeping a division in reserve, in case the main body of the army was to be encircled by the Turks, which reminds us of the third line of cavalry added by Nicephoros Phocas to fight the Bedouin units of the Hamdanids of Aleppo.¹⁰⁶⁰ Finally, the battle against Ridwan was the first time during this crusade when the Latins fought under a single count that had the overall command of the dispatched force, since at Doryleum there was no leader and they were under no unified command until that time. This remarkable adaptability of Bohemond with battle-tactics, and his pursuit of an aggressive battle-seeking strategy to make optimum use of limited forces,

¹⁰⁵⁹ For this battle, see: France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 245-51; Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 279-81; Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, pp. 170-1; Delbruck, *Medieval Warfare*, vol. III, p. 404; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 224-25; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, pp. 63-4.

¹⁰⁶⁰ "Praecepta Militaria", IV. 180-84, p. 48.

certainly highlights why he was viewed by his allies and his enemies as the true military leader of the First Crusade.

According to our chroniclers, after the capitulation of the lower city of Antioch (3rd June 1098), the Count of Taranto was one of the protagonists of the siege of the Antiochene citadel.¹⁰⁶¹ But Bohemond's leading role as a Latin leader was to be highlighted once more in the second major battle against the Seljuqs, this time when a large relief force arrived outside Antioch to find the westerners locked inside their newly acquired trophy. What is important to underline before examining the battle of Antioch is not only Bohemond's place amongst the rest of the leaders, with Raymond of Aguilers putting him as the general who proposed the battle-plan, but also the battle-plan itself which was, in essence, similar to the one applied against the Turks from Aleppo in February. He used the topography of the region in his favour while keeping a number of units in reserve in case the army was surrounded.

The governor of Mosul Kerbogha, with the main body of his army,¹⁰⁶² had pitched his camp on the north side of the Orontes, so the only way for the Latins to reach the camp was to exit the city through the Bridge Gate, which was the only one that connected the two banks of the river. On the 28th June,¹⁰⁶³ the crusaders sallied out of the city in battle order in four major divisions; Hugh of Vermandois, Robert of Flanders and Robert of Normandy were deployed in the right wing; the Lorrainers, Burgundians and other French troops, under the command of Godfrey of Bouillon formed the centre, and Provençal and Aquitanian troops were posted in the left wing under Bishop Adhemar. Tancred and Bohemond's units formed

¹⁰⁶¹ *Gesta Francorum*, xxiv, pp. 57-9; William of Tyre, Book VI, V, pp. 266-8; *Alexiad*, XI. iv, vol. II, pp. 86-91; Sewter, pp. 342-5.

¹⁰⁶² *The chronicle of Ibn al-Athīr for the crusading period from al-Kāmil fī'l-ta'rīkh*, tr. D.S. Richards, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006-7, part I, 276, p. 16.

¹⁰⁶³ The main primary sources for the battle are: *Gesta Francorum*, xxix, pp. 67-71; William of Tyre, Book VI, XVI-XXI, pp. 284-94; Albert of Aachen, IV. 47-56, pp. 320-36; Raymond d'Aguilers, 77-83/Hill and Hill, pp. 59-64; Ralph of Caen, 83-90, pp. 105-10.

the reserve divisions of the crusaders' army.¹⁰⁶⁴ The infantry and the archers were placed in front to hold back the enemy's attacks, while the cavalry was kept behind in order to break out and win the battle with its heavy charge.¹⁰⁶⁵ This tactic of deploying the cavalry behind the foot soldiers of the infantry and the archers had been seen before, both at Hastings (1066) and Dyrrachium (1081), and indeed resembles the whole idea of the infantry serving as a "shield" for the cavalry. Further, precautions were taken by Bohemond to prevent the encirclement of the army by the Seljuks, thus keeping a division in reserve while the flanks of the crusaders were covered by the Orontes on the right and the high mountains on the left.¹⁰⁶⁶

The crucial stage of the deployment of the crusader army would have been their crossing of the Orontes Bridge and Bohemond was afraid that the Seljuks would allow one or two divisions of them across the river and then fall upon them while the rest of the army was crossing the bridge. But this did not happen and the Latins were left free to be deployed as they wished, quite likely because Kerbogha would have wanted to use his encircling tactics and outflank the entire army.¹⁰⁶⁷ There is a debate, however, on the deployment of the crusader forces on the battlefield right after they had marched over the Orontes River and whether the divisions changed their formation from column into line.¹⁰⁶⁸ Kerbogha would have seen that the left wing of the Latins, under Adhemar, was the last to have crossed the Orontes' bridge to be deployed alongside the rest of the divisions and he ordered his right-wing units to attack them before they were ready for action. These mounted troops – 15,000

¹⁰⁶⁴ Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 283-4; Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p. 173; Delbruck, *Medieval Warfare*, vol. III, pp. 404-5; Verbruggen, *The Art of Warfare*, pp. 226-28.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Albert of Aachen, IV. 49, p. 324; Raymond d'Aguilers, p. 79/Hill and Hill, p. 61; *Gesta Francorum*, xxix, p. 68 .

¹⁰⁶⁶ Raymond puts him as the general who proposed the battle-plan, see: Raymond d'Aguilers, p. 78/Hill and Hill, p. 60.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Probably Kerbogha would have underestimated the size of the crusaders' army. See: Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 283-4.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, p. 173; compare with: France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 284-5.

horsemen from the Sultanate of Rum –¹⁰⁶⁹ managed to bypass Adhemar's divisions and arrive at the rear of the crusaders' left wing, thus being completely cut off from the main Seljuc army. Fortunately for the Latins, Bohemond's precaution of keeping his Norman troops in reserve proved a wise decision since if the detached right wing of the Seljucs was left unchecked to attack the Latin centre from the rear it would certainly had been a disaster. The Anatolian Turks, after the rest of the army was overpowered by Godfrey and Hugh, kept an immense pressure on the Normans and dropping their usual encircling tactics charged against them with their swords and lances before they were eventually beaten off by the Norman infantry units who formed a perimeter ring around the cavalry.

A rather different approach on how the events unfolded that day is given by J. France.¹⁰⁷⁰ He believes that since the plain between the Orontes and the mountains opposite the Bridge Gate was too wide – about four to five kilometres – for the small Crusader force to cover its full extent, the argument of the Crusading army taking advantage of the topography of the battlefield to avoid any encircling is invalid. The Latins rather took full advantage of the dispersal of the Turkish forces in the perimeter of Antioch's fortifications, something that they had been at pains to avoid throughout their siege of the city. Since Kerbogha had pitched his camp up the valley of the Orontes at a distance of some five kilometres to the north of the city and had sent infantry and irregular mounted Turcoman detachments to blockade the main gates of Antioch, the Latins wisely decided to exit the city through the Bridge Gate and face the Turkish besieging detachments before the main army had time to organise and march against them. Thus, Hugh of Vermandois' division would have opened the way out through the forces that were blocking the Bridge Gate and each division would have been deployed next to the one preceding it and on its left flank, following the order I have already mentioned although it is unlikely that they would have had time to deploy into tidy formations before attacking their enemies. The rather short fighting and retreat that developed after the Crusaders fighting exit from the city must have been a result of them being attacked

¹⁰⁶⁹ Albert of Aachen, IV. 49, p. 326; William of Tyre, Book VI, XX, p. 291.

¹⁰⁷⁰ France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 287-93.

piecemeal and in no order by Turkish infantry detachments that were gradually leaving their besieging posts and pressing with the attack without waiting for orders from Kerbogha's headquarters. And perhaps the force that "arrived" on their rear might have been a force that was besieging St-George's Gate on the south of the city. Thus what France suggests is that the Crusaders' first and second divisions were engaged in a fight with the Turks from the Bridge Gate while Adhemar's long march westwards towards the plain would have served to cover the flanks of the army and eventually received the piecemeal attacks of several Turkish detachments. Bohemond's division was, indeed, placed as a reserve to prevent the encirclement of the army while an improvised unit was detached from the armies of Godfrey of Bouillon and Robert of Normandy to deal with a unit of 15,000 men, as reported by Albert of Aix, that had managed to bypass Adhemar's division.

The lessons learned for the crusaders on the aftermath of this battle were simple enough. In order to diminish their numerical disadvantage and to check the attacks of the Seljuc mounted archers they put their infantry in front of their formations and kept the cavalry in the back, waiting for the perfect chance to break out and fight them in close quarters. Thus, the Latin East experienced for the first time the mixed units of infantry and cavalry where the foot-soldiers acquired a fundamental role in Middle-East warfare. However, we should underline the fact that by this stage of the Crusade the infantry would have evolved into a quite formidable fighting unit – with better armour protection as well – which was most needed in the East. This comment does not suggest that the footsoldiers of the First Crusade were a mere rubble of untrained men when they crossed to Asia Minor in 1097, but that it took several months of intense interaction with the Turks to develop into a cohesive and disciplined unit.¹⁰⁷¹ And even if the Latins did not actually use natural obstacles to cover their flanks, meaning the Orontes on the right and the mountains on their left, we have to remark

¹⁰⁷¹ France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 294-96; idem, "Technology and the First Crusade", 174-75; Smail believes that the idea of a developing infantry force is unsatisfactory and that the footsoldiers at Doryleum were a force fit for war, although he bases his argument solely on the *Anonymous'* account: Smail, *Crusading Warfare*, pp. 115-120.

the keeping of a reserve division under Bohemond that seemed to offer great protection for the Latins' flanks. The key to the victories at Antioch and Harem depended on their command, with the Latin leaders – and Bohemond in particular, adapting to the Middle-Eastern warfare in both a rapid and effective way.

Bohemond's establishment at Antioch

In March 1099 Bohemond was officially proclaimed Prince of Antioch.¹⁰⁷² His dominions extended from the vicinity of Antioch to northern Syria and southern Cilicia, including the strategic passes of the Taurus and the Armenian principalities of the region. To the north-east his flanks were covered by Baldwin's principality of Edessa, while from the east and south his domains were exposed to the Turkish principality of Aleppo which was under the rule of Ridwan and, thus, posed no immediate danger. To the south, Bohemond had to face the Byzantine outposts of Laodicea, Valania, Tortosa and Maraclea, Syrian coastal cities handed over to the Byzantine legates in April 1099. A number of Norman troops, under Tancred, departed for Jerusalem, but the bulk of Bohemond's men would have stayed with him, certainly not numbering more than a few hundred.¹⁰⁷³ Apart from a border dispute with Imperial troops and the loss of two Cilician coastal towns – Seleucia and Curicus,¹⁰⁷⁴ Bohemond's major target in 1099 was Laodicea, one of the most strategic ports of the Eastern Mediterranean. The Norman Count even enlisted the help of Daimbert of Pisa – the new Papal legate in the east who was also supported by a large fleet – but due to the arrival of Raymond of St-Gilles from Jerusalem in September and the flaring up of the old rivalry between the two leaders, the siege reached a halt.¹⁰⁷⁵

¹⁰⁷² I have not had the chance to look at: T. Asbridge, "The Principality of Antioch 1098-1130", unpublished DPhil thesis, London, 1995.

¹⁰⁷³ *Gesta Francorum*, xxxvii, p. 87.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Alexiad*, XI. ix, vol. II, p. 112; Sewter, pp. 358-9; XI. x, vol. II, p. 120; Sewter, pp. 363-4.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Albert of Aachen, VI. 57, 60, pp. 480, 84.

In 1100, Bohemond managed to get involved into the internal politics of the Seljuc dynasty of the Danishmenids who controlled a large area of Asia Minor, from Caesarea to Ankara and Sinope. He marched with an army towards Melitene and, according to Albert of Aachen he took with him 500 knights, a quite reasonable number if we compare it with Ibn-al-Athir's implausible figure of 5,000. They were ambushed by the Turks and in the ensuing fight Richard of Principate and Bohemond were taken prisoners, probably in the month of July or early August 1100.¹⁰⁷⁶ There is no detailed description of the battle, but from the chroniclers' accounts we can see that the Norman knights were completely surprised by the Turks, quite likely due to Bohemond's neglect of sending scouts to reconnoitre the area, who were then able to apply their usual encircling tactics until "the whole company was overcome: killed or put to flight and scattered."¹⁰⁷⁷

Nearly a year after his release from captivity,¹⁰⁷⁸ there is one last battle where Bohemond took place before his return to Italy, a battle that was literally a disaster in terms of battle-tactics applied. The battle of Harran (1104)¹⁰⁷⁹ was the result of an expedition carried on by the combined forces of Bohemond of Antioch and Baldwin of Edessa to neutralize a threat to the latter's principality coming from the Seljuc stronghold of the town of Harran, some forty kilometres east of Edessa. While the siege of the town was under way, a Seljuc relief army of about 10,000 men arrived with a plan to attack the Latin camp while attempting to supply the garrison of Harran. As Sir Charles Oman puts it, the battle of Harran may be taken as an example of the manner in which even the most practised veterans of the First Crusade could fail when they neglected obvious precautions and fought on unfavourable ground. But what

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibn-al-Athir, I, 300, p. 32 ; Orderic Vitalis, XIII, p. 506; *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, II, 134, pp. 176-7; Ralph of Caen, 141, pp. 156-7; Albert of Aachen, VII. 27, p. 524.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Matthew of Edessa tells us that they were not wearing their hauberks when the Turks fell on them. See: *The Chronicle of Matthew of Edessa*, II, 134, pp. 176-7; Ralph of Caen, 141, p. 157.

¹⁰⁷⁸ For Bohemond's captivity: Flori, *Bohémond d' Antioch*, pp. 219-26.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Our main primary sources are: William of Tyre, vol. I, X. 29, pp. 456-8 ; *Ralph of Caen*, pp. 164-5; the best secondary work on this battle is: Oman, *Art of War*, vol. I, pp. 320-24.

were, exactly, the tactical blunders of Bohemond and Baldwin in this case and why did they prove so disastrous at Harran in particular? The crusaders deployed their forces in three battles, once again throwing the infantry in front of the cavalry, while the Seljuks applied their usual tactics of encirclement and feigned retreat. Despite their great experience in Middle-Eastern warfare, Bohemond and Baldwin followed the Seljuk retreat into the sandy and hilly terrains east of Harran, a serious tactical error. By the afternoon hours, with the infantry and cavalry unable to carry on the chase, the Latins halted the march and for the first time they experienced an attack by their enemies when least expected, during the night. Night-attacks were not uncommon in the Middle-East, with the Fatimids applying it several times since the late tenth century, while the Byzantine treatise *On Skirmishing* sets out in detail how a night-attack should be organised.¹⁰⁸⁰ Thus, the disaster at Harran was due to the failure of Bohemond and Baldwin to follow a series of simple precautions against an enemy that they had faced numerous times in the last seven years and had grown accustomed to their tactics by then. Bohemond's decision to follow the Turks far from Harran and not place any guards in the camp during the night is wholly inexcusable.

As a concluding section of this chapter I wish to return to the two main questions that I set in the beginning: what was Bohemond's role in the First Crusade and what experience did he acquire in fighting against the Seljuk Turks, lessons that would seem invaluable during his Illyrian expedition in 1107? I will base my conclusions on the analyses of the three major battles of the second stage of the Crusade: Doryleum, Harem and Antioch; and I will focus on three major factors that decided the outcome of each one of them: general strategy of the commander of the Latin army, composition of the army and battle formations, and topography of the battlefield.

Bohemond's leading role in the Crusade was obvious even before the first major operation of the Latin armies in the East – the siege of Nicaea. He was certainly the most experienced

¹⁰⁸⁰ Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. II, pp. 124-35; "On Skirmishing", 24. pp. 234-37.

of the officers for what was lying ahead of them as he had fought against Byzantine and Turkish forces in the previous decades, both in Italy and in the Balkans. It is very likely that his forces would have consisted of veterans of the Apulian and Sicilian expansion and soldiers who would have taken part in Robert Guiscard's Illyrian expedition almost two decades before. Finally, we should mention the unknown number of western mercenaries serving in the Byzantine army already since the late 1040s, with a large number of them returning to their countries with huge experience in the battlefields of Asia Minor in fighting against the Seljuks. Thus, we should not be surprised to see Bohemond negotiating the amount of supplies shipped to Nicomedia while the rest of the Latin army was besieging Nicaea, or his leading role in conducting foraging expeditions and neutralising enemy garrisons during the siege of Antioch.

But Bohemond's resourcefulness and great strategic thinking have to be viewed through the study of the three major battles of the period. I will ask in which cases was he the undisputed leader of the Latin army that clashed with the Turks. What role did the topography of the battlefield play? Was his overall strategy considered defensive or not? At Doryleum, Bohemond was the commander of the group of armies that was attacked by Kilij Arslan on the 31st June 1097 and he commanded an unknown number of cavalry and infantry, including a large number of civilians. The tactical mistakes that the Count of Taranto made that day was that he left his infantry to guard the baggage train, while the cavalry was ordered to hold the line against the Turkish attacks in a single mass of horsemen. In a clearly defensive formation, this mass of Latin knights was hopeless against the encircling manoeuvres of the Turkish mounted archers. Their attempts to counterattack brought no result and it was only the timely arrival of the second group of armies under Godfrey that saved the day for the crusaders. If the Latins had formed a mixed unit of infantry and cavalry as in Antioch or Ascalon, they would certainly have found themselves in a less desperate situation and would have suffered much less losses. Kilij Arslan placed an ambush on the vanguard of the Latin armies, having to choose a battleground that would suit both the relatively small size of his army and the encircling tactics of his mounted archers. Thus, the

Seljuks held the initiative at Doryleum, something that the Latins – and especially Bohemond – would never let this happen again.

Bohemond was the undisputed leader who proposed the battle-plan – according to Raymond of Aguilers – for the clash with Kerbogha's army outside Antioch. He took advantage of the dispersal of Kerbogha's forces and decided to suddenly sally-out of the city in order to bring the enemy forces in close combat and neutralise them as soon as possible before the arrival of the main army. He had divided the Latin army in five divisions, keeping one in reserve, thus having both his flanks covered from any encircling movement by the enemy. And it was in Antioch that we see for the first time in the history of the Latin armies in the Middle-East units of infantry being put in front of the cavalry for better protection of the knights from the Turkish mounted archers. This, however, does not imply that this tactic was unknown to western armies, as the examples of Hastings and Dyrrachium can show. But Bohemond's strategic thinking proves his adaptability to the Middle-Eastern way of fighting and to the worsening conditions in his army – the crusaders would have had maybe even less than 300 horses by that time.¹⁰⁸¹

Compared to the battle of Harem a few months earlier, the basic strategic principles applied against the Seljuks were the same. The strategic initiative belonged to Bohemond who ambushed a large relief army heading for Antioch. He used the topography of the region in his favour, trapping the Turks in a narrow defile between Lake Bengras and the River Orontes where it would have been impossible for them to apply their usual tactics. Also, having divided his 700 horsemen into five divisions, he kept one in reserve in case the main body of his army was encircled. He knew that the crucial strategic move was to bring his knights in contact with the enemy as quickly as possible, and that was exactly what eventually gave him the field.

Bohemond was, indeed, a soldier with great experience in fighting overseas. He had fought against Greek, Anglo-Saxon and Turkish troops during his father's Illyrian campaign

¹⁰⁸¹ France, *Victory in the East*, pp. 281-82, 286; Riley-Smith, *Crusades*, p. 30.

some fifteen years ago, having defeated the Emperor's army in pitched battle three times before he was forced to pull back to Dyrrachium after his failure at Larisa. In 1083, it was a series of ambushes and feigned retreats conducted by units of the Byzantines that defeated Bohemond's army, with the Normans easily falling into the trap that was planned in every detail by Alexius Comnenus. Thus his experience in the East should have made him more cautious and innovative in the battle-field, because for years he was facing a cunning enemy – as the Turk's night attack at Harran in 1104 proves – whose battle-tactics were very different than what the Normans were used to. However, the tight blockade that was imposed by Alexius' forces in 1107-8 would prove unbreakable and Bohemond's first strategic objective of establishing a forward base for his "Crusade" will end up a failure.

12. Bohemond's invasion of Illyria (1107-8)

Bohemond returned to Italy sometime in the early months of 1105,¹⁰⁸² after having to fake his own death and be transported from Syria to Italy through Corfu. In Corfu, Bohemond “emerged from the dead” and sent a defiant message to Alexius: “I want you [Alexius] to know that, I have escaped your clutches. ... If I reach the mainland of Italy and cast eyes on the Lombards and all the Latins and the Germans and our own Franks, men full of martial valour, then with many a murder I will make your cities and your provinces run with blood, until I set up my spear in Byzantium itself.”¹⁰⁸³ There can be very little doubt that this incident in Corfu did not take place, but a number of questions quickly arise. What were the deeper political reasons that drove the Norman count to invade Byzantium? How was Bohemond's expedition preached in the West? Can we characterise it as a crusade?

By 1104, Bohemond had left his territories in Syria under serious pressure from the Imperial forces, with the Byzantine Army firmly in control of Cilicia and the lower city of Laodicea and the Navy carrying offensive operations from Cyprus and the Cilician ports.¹⁰⁸⁴ Thus, if Bohemond had taken his newly recruited army back to Antioch he certainly would not have achieved much, with the Byzantine resources in manpower and money far outnumbering what the Normans could put in the field.¹⁰⁸⁵ Bohemond must have been perfectly aware of that, thus, he thought that he had to strike at the root of all his troubles in Syria, meaning Alexius himself and attempt to replace him with a more sympathetic Emperor. A plan very similar to that of the Fourth Crusade.¹⁰⁸⁶

¹⁰⁸² January according to: *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1105.

¹⁰⁸³ *Alexiad*, XI. xii, vol. II, pp. 128-30; Sewter, pp. 367-8.

¹⁰⁸⁴ For more details on this, see: Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, pp. 85-105; Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, pp. 231-8.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, p. 74; Flori, *Bohemond d'Antioch*, p. 278; Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, vol. II, p. 58.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 401-15, especially pp. 413-15; Treadgold, *Byzantine State and Society*, pp. 656-66.

We know little of Bohemond's whereabouts in Italy during the second half of 1105, but his intentions were to raise an army of volunteers and mobilize powerful allies for his planned invasion. Pope Paschal II (1099-1118) seemed like an obvious ally, along with Philip of France and Henry of England, but how fruitful did his journey through Italy and France prove to be? Bohemond remained in southern Italy, probably at Taranto or Bari preparing his fleet, from the early months of 1105 until September,¹⁰⁸⁷ when he departed for Rome. Paschal was a Crusading enthusiast and he, like others, held the Byzantine Emperor accountable for the misfortunes of the 1101 Crusade, bearing in mind the famous denunciation of Alexius by bishop Manasses of Barcelona at the Papal court in 1102.¹⁰⁸⁸ According to Bartolf of Nangis, the continuator of Fulcher of Chartres writing in Syria around 1108-9, who is our only source for this event, Paschal gave Bohemond the banner of St-Peter.¹⁰⁸⁹ Further, Bruno, bishop of Segni, a Cluniac and a bishop who had escorted Urban II in his visit to France in 1095-6, was appointed as Papal legate to preach for the upcoming campaign against Byzantium in France along with Bohemond himself.¹⁰⁹⁰ As for what might have encouraged Paschal to give his blessing to the Norman count, for this we have to turn to Orderic Vitalis who informs us about the presence of a supposed son of the deposed Byzantine Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes (1068-71) and a number of nobles at his papal court.¹⁰⁹¹ This is significant in a

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1105.

¹⁰⁸⁸ This sentiment can be seen in: Ekkehard, *Hierosolymita*, pp. 29-32, 37-8; Fulcherius Carnotensis, p. 521; Orderic Vitalis, X, p. 18; William of Tyre, XI, pp. 79-80, 460-2, 470-1; Albert of Aachen, VIII. 45-6, pp. 634-6; Compare the two different views of the "Manasses incident": Runciman, *History*, vol. II, p. 35; J.G. Rowe, "Paschal II, Bohemund of Antioch and the Byzantine Empire", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 49 (1966-67), 170-6.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Bartolf of Nangis, *Gesta Francorum Iherusalem Expugnatium*, R.H.C. Hist. Oc., vol. 65, III, p. 538; for the reliability of this source, see: Rowe, "Paschal II", 180; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, p. 108; for more on Bartolf of Nangis, see: C. Cahen, *La Syrie du Nord a l'Epoque des Croisades*, Paris, 1940, p. 11; Runciman, *History*, vol. I, p. 329.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Chronic. Casin.*, IV, p. 493; Suger, Abbot of St-Denis, *Vie de Louis VI le Gros*, ed. H. Waquet, H. Champion, Paris, 1929, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹¹ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p. 70.

sense that we see Bohemond using the same pattern to win over the Pope as his father had done twenty-five years before.

Bohemond stayed in Rome until mid-November 1105,¹⁰⁹² and then he departed for France to recruit the bulk of his followers by launching an unprecedented anti-Byzantine propaganda campaign. Even before leaving Italy, Bohemond had already sent envoys to Henry I of England (1100-1135), but since Henry's preoccupations at the time lay across the Channel and against Robert Curthose, so it is no surprise that a meeting never took place.¹⁰⁹³ In March 1106, Bohemond was in the Limousin fulfilling a vow he had made to St-Leonard, the patron saint of prisoners, and sometime later he requested an audience from Philip of France concerning a possible marriage between him and Philip's daughter.¹⁰⁹⁴ The marriage took place at Chartres right after Easter, while during Lent Bohemond had been travelling around France spreading his anti-Byzantine propaganda. Some Latin chroniclers attest that he went far into the south-west of France and even to Spain,¹⁰⁹⁵ important centres of recruitment for a crusade, accompanied by bishop Bruno of Segni to add a more religious tone to his appeal, before returning to Apulia in August 1106.

Concerning Bohemond's tour of France, both Anna Comnena and Orderic Vitalis write about him inciting hatred among the French population in the cities he visited, not only by accusing Alexius Comnenus of being "a pagan who was helping pagans wholeheartedly",¹⁰⁹⁶ but also through the parade of the supposed son of the Emperor Romanus and a number of Byzantine nobles.¹⁰⁹⁷ Also, it is known through modern research that Bohemond distributed copies of the *Gesta Francorum* in which he had inserted a passage suggesting that the

¹⁰⁹² On the 18th November we find Paschal issuing a privilege in favour of a Church at Bari, requested by Bohemond. See: *Patrologia Cursus Completus, series Latina*, vol. 163, col. 178.

¹⁰⁹³ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p. 68.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p. 70; *Alexiad*, XII. i, vol. II, p. 132; Sewter, p. 369; Romuald of Salerno, s.a. 1106; William of Tyre, vol. I, Book XI, I, p. 460.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Ekkehard, *Hierosolymita*, p. 293; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, p. 112.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Alexiad*, XII. i, vol. II, pp. 132-3; Sewter. p. 371.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p. 70.

Emperor had promised him the lordship of Antioch, in an obvious attempt to advertise his crusading achievements, attract more followers and display the “wickedness” of Emperor Alexius.¹⁰⁹⁸ But even though Bohemond’s real objective was Constantinople, he would have presented the expedition to his audience as a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a *via Sancti Sepulchri*, after the Byzantine Empire had been “pacified”.¹⁰⁹⁹ Orderic Vitalis also writes about Bohemond who “urged all who bore arms to attack the Emperor with him, and promised his chosen followers wealthy towns and castles. Many taking the Lord’s cross, left all their belongings and set out on the road for Jerusalem.”¹¹⁰⁰ Whether this statement about the attack on the Empire was made under the advantage of hindsight we cannot be certain, but Orderic Vitalis’ reliability is difficult to question. To add to the aforementioned accounts, a number of Latin sources, namely Ekkehard, Albert of Aachen, the author of the *Historia Belli Sacri* and the Anonymous of Bari, note that Bohemond’s purpose in coming to Italy and France was to raise troops to invade the Empire.¹¹⁰¹

From the evidence that we have mentioned so far, we can conclude that Bohemond’s expedition was a Crusade for it was preached as a *via sancti sepulchri*, the banner of St-Peter was provided and a papal legate was sent to preach and inspire the masses. Whether or not Pope Pascal had given his full support for this campaign can be debated and all depends on

¹⁰⁹⁸ A.C. Krey, “A Neglected Passage in the Gesta and its Bearing on the Literature of the First Crusade”, *The Crusades and Other Historical Essays: Presented to D.C. Munro*, ed. J.L. Peatow, New York, 1927, 57-78.

¹⁰⁹⁹ The references about the terminology used to identify the campaign of 1107 come from the Council of Poitiers, held on 26th June 1106. They come from the testimonies of Suger and Orderic Vitalis who were eyewitnesses of the events. See: Suger, pp. 44-50; Orderic Vitalis, XI, pp. 68-70.

¹¹⁰⁰ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p. 70.

¹¹⁰¹ Ekkehard, *Hierosolymita*, p. 293; Albert of Aachen, IX. 47, p. 702; *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1105; *Historia Belli Sacri*, R.H.C. Occ., III, pp. 228-9; Rowe argues about how reliable Ekkehard’s and Albert’s accounts are. See: Rowe, “Paschal II”, 176-7; Rowe’s arguments have been challenged by: McQueen, “Relations between the Normans and Byzantium”, 458-62.

whether we think that the primary sources are credible enough or should be dismissed because they provide information based on hindsight.¹¹⁰²

Regarding Alexius' preparations for the Norman threat, Alexius decided to mediate for the release of 300 western knights of the Kingdom of Jerusalem that had been captured by the Fatimids at Ramlah in May 1102.¹¹⁰³ This can be seen as Comnenus' answer to rapidly diminishing popularity of the Empire in the West after the 1101 Crusade and the Manasses incident. He also took immediate steps to recall several senior officers of his army and navy from distant posts to Dyrrachium. Generals with experienced troops who were serving in Coele-Syria and Cilicia, a very important and strategic post neighbouring the newly established Latin principalities and the Seljuks, like Cantacuzenos and Monastras were sent to report for duty at Dyrrachium.¹¹⁰⁴

In addition, Alexius sought to take on his side any Italian naval power that might have provided assistance or reinforcements to Bohemond's army. Anna Comnena talks about a number of letters sent to the great Italian naval powers like Pisa, Genoa and Venice, seeking to persuade them not to join forces with the Normans.¹¹⁰⁵ Alexius' action was quite reasonable if we consider their actions and alliances in the First Crusade. All three of them had actively taken part in the Crusade, with Genoa helping the Latins to take Antioch (1098), Jerusalem (1099), Caesarea (1101) and Acre (1104), and Venice very reluctantly helping

¹¹⁰² Tyerman, *God's War*, pp. 261-2; J. Riley-Smith, *The Crusades*, Athlone, London, 1987, p. 90; Ralph-Johannes Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1994, p. 74; Rowe, "Paschal II", 165-202; J. Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, Continuum, London, 2006, pp. 88-92; Runciman, *History*, vol. II, p. 48; Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, pp. 106-14; Flori, *Bohemond d'Antioch*, pp. 266-72, especially pp. 275-77; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, p. 164; J. France, *The Crusades and the Expansion of Catholic Christendom, 1000-1714*, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 102; McQueen, "Relations between the Normans and Byzantium", 458-62.

¹¹⁰³ *Alexiad*, XII. i, vol. II, p. 133; Sewter, pp. 370-1.

¹¹⁰⁴ *Alexiad*, XII. ii, vol. II, p. 136; Sewter, p. 371; Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, n. 1, p. 239.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Alexiad*, XII, i, vol. II, p. 132; Sewter, p. 369.

Baldwin of Edessa to take Haifa and Tripoli in 1100.¹¹⁰⁶ But Alexius was deeply concerned about Bohemond's possible "flirting" with Pisa, since it was its navy that had devastated Corfu, Cephalonia, Leukada and Zante, the largest of the islands of the Ionian Sea, had clashed with a Byzantine naval squadron off Rhodes and later joined Bohemond in the siege of Laodicea in the summer of 1099.¹¹⁰⁷ But why would the relations of the Pisans with Byzantium amount to dislike, not mentioning hatred? In theory, at least, Venice was still a vassal state of the Empire and especially after the *chrysobull* of 1082 the former had become by far the most important player in the Byzantine Empire's commercial life. Alexius was perfectly aware of the antagonism between the Italian naval states, thus the letters he sent and it is, indeed, unfortunate that we do not have the details of any diplomatic correspondence between the two sides to see what kind of language the Emperor used to address the Pisan municipality.¹¹⁰⁸

Alexius left Constantinople for Thessaloniki in September 1105, where he spent the winter of 1105/6, still being there in late February – early March of 1106, calling for recruits from the Balkan provinces.¹¹⁰⁹ There would certainly have been a large number of veterans from past conflicts in the Balkans, but new recruits formed a significant part of Alexius' army. The Emperor also replaced John Comnenus, the former governor of Dyrrachium with Alexius, the second son of the *sebastocrator* Isaac Comnenus, while also giving the latter strict instructions concerning the strengthening of the city's defences.¹¹¹⁰

Alexius' affairs in Thessaloniki got more complicated when a rebellion broke out by the Serbs and John Comnenus was defeated in Dalmatia, forcing him to stay in the city for fourteen more months before dismissing his troops and retiring back to Constantinople. Since by this time Bohemond had been spreading his anti-Byzantine propaganda in France, I do not

¹¹⁰⁶ Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, pp. 68-78.

¹¹⁰⁷ For more on this incident, see the previous chapter on the Comnenian navy.

¹¹⁰⁸ Neither Anna Comnena, Dandolo or the *Annales Pisani* mention anything in their accounts.

¹¹⁰⁹ *Alexiad*, XII. iv, vol. II, pp. 141, 147-148; Sewter, pp. 374, 378-79.

¹¹¹⁰ *Alexiad*, XII. iv, vol. II, p. 148; Sewter, p. 379.

think we should consider a possible cooperation between the Serbs of Raska, that had replaced the Diocleans as the dominant Serb principality in the region since 1091, and the Normans.¹¹¹¹ During this time Alexius appointed Isaac Contostephanus as Grand Duke of the Fleet, while orders were given for a naval squadron to be assembled from several maritime and coastal areas of the Empire like the Cyclades and “the cities on the coast of Asia and from Europe itself”, probably meaning the old naval themes of Hellas, Peloponnesus, Samos, Aegean Sea and Cibyreots, including Crete and Cyprus.¹¹¹² His fleet would probably have consisted of relatively small and fast ships specifically build for the purpose of patrolling the coastline and not large *dromons* or *chelandia* which were expensive to build and hard to keep at sea for long periods. But again, we cannot be certain about the consistency of the navy because Anna’s terminology is not accurate enough. Isaac Contostephanus, however, being ignorant of naval affairs and of the coastal topography of Epirus and Illyria, took the decision to attack and besiege Otranto on the opposite Adriatic coast (early in 1107), an undertaking which proved an utter failure for the Byzantine commander.¹¹¹³

Bohemond’s invasion of Illyria

Bohemond was in Apulia preparing his fleet from August 1106 until September 1107.¹¹¹⁴ In late summer of 1107 his army was ordered to gather at Bari and from there they marched to Brindisi where the fleet had already assembled, in the early days of September. The Norman forces set sail from Brindisi on the 9th October and landed on the opposite coast of Avlona.¹¹¹⁵ Trying to assess the size of the army or of the naval force gathered by Bohemond

¹¹¹¹ For the politics of the region and the tense relations between the zupans of Raska and Alexius Comnenus, see: Fine, *Early Medieval Balkans*, pp. 230-32.

¹¹¹² *Alexiad*, XII. iv, vol. II, p. 148; Sewter, p. 379; XII. viii, vol. II, p. 165; Sewter, p. 389.

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.*, XII. viii, vol. II, pp. 165-9; Sewter, p. 389.

¹¹¹⁴ *Anon. Bar.*, s.a.1106-7.

¹¹¹⁵ Fulcherius Carnotensis, pp. 519-20; The Anonymous of Bari mentions the 10th October, which probably was the day of landing at Avlona: *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1107; Anna Comnena does

for his expedition can be a challenging task since the Latin sources and Anna Comnena give quite vague and rather confusing assessments. However, before going into detailed examination of the sources, we have to note that by the end of the eleventh century the south Italian ports seem to have developed a technological and technical capacity to carry rather more horses per ship than the fifteen or so of the Byzantine navy of the time.¹¹¹⁶ Thus, the Norman navy had developed since the times of the Sicilian invasion or Robert Guiscard's Illyrian campaign. According to the *Alexiad*, Bohemond had deployed a core of twelve warships, biremes according to the princess, but she does not give a definite number for his transport vessels thus making it impossible to have an accurate figure of the men and horses transported across the Adriatic.¹¹¹⁷ The Anonymous of Bari talks about a nucleus of thirty warships, again probably biremes, and a number of around two hundred large and small ships for the transportation of his army and the necessary supplies, an excessive number which, I believe, we have to narrow down to a half to reflect a possible figure. Our source also estimates the total of men, both infantry and cavalry, to around 34,000 which is once more an exaggerated number.¹¹¹⁸ Other Latin sources like Fulcher of Chartres give a number of 5,000 cavalry and 60,000 infantry,¹¹¹⁹ William of Tyre talks about the same number of cavalry but notes a figure of 40,000 foot,¹¹²⁰ while Albert of Aachen puts the figures up to 12,000 cavalry and 60,000 infantry.¹¹²¹ I believe that the figure provided by the Anonymous of Bari is closer to the truth concerning the foot soldiers, but even 5,000 men is an excessive number for the cavalry which we have to narrow down to around a half, probably somewhere between 2,500-3,000, although I have to repeat that any speculations of this kind are very risky. Anna

mention the 9th October but erroneously gives as point of embarkation the port of Bari:

Alexiad, XII, ix, vol. II, p. 172; Sewter, p. 392.

¹¹¹⁶ Pryor, "Transportation of Horses by Sea", 14.

¹¹¹⁷ *Alexiad*, XII, ix, vol. II, p. 170; Sewter, p. 392.

¹¹¹⁸ *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1107.

¹¹¹⁹ Fulcherius Carnotensis, p. 521.

¹¹²⁰ William of Tyre, XI, 6, p. 471.

¹¹²¹ Albert of Aachen, X, 40, p. 754.

Comnena tells us that Bohemond had with him “a countless host of Franks and Kelts, together with the entire contingent of men from the Isle of Thule who normally serve in the Roman army but had through force of circumstances then joined him; not to mention an even stronger force of Germans and Celtiberians.”¹¹²² It was French, Italians, Germans, Spaniards and Anglo-Norman soldiers who answered Bohemond’s and Bruno’s Crusading call against the “pagan supporters”, with the Anglo-Normans however probably joining Bohemond’s contingent from Normandy and not England.¹¹²³

Isaac Contostephanus had been informed about Bohemond’s gathering of troops on the opposite coast and, based on his little experience in naval affairs, he concluded that the landing would take place at Avlona rather than Dyrrachium. Surprisingly enough, after posting the bulk of his units off the coasts of Avlona, Isaac Contostephanus along with a number of his senior officers pretended to fall ill and retired to the local baths. There is no way by which we can find out the deeper reason behind this controversial decision of Contostephanus, apart from any possible traitorous correspondence between him and Bohemond, quite likely when the latter was besieging Otranto a few months before.¹¹²⁴ The officer who took effective command of the Byzantine naval units was a certain Landulph who had “vast experience of surprise attacks in naval warfare over a long period.”¹¹²⁵ Landulph was an officer born in Italy and the first time he is mentioned by Anna Comnena was a Grand Duke of the fleet that intercepted the Pisan naval squadron heading for the Holy Land in 1099, while he was also in command of a fleet that attacked a Genoese squadron off the Cilicia coasts in 1104.¹¹²⁶

After disembarking his army at Avlona and securing and plundering the surrounding region, Bohemond must have taken over the smaller castles of Kanina and Orikon, as his

¹¹²² *Alexiad*, XII, ix, vol. II, p. 172; Sewter, p. 392.

¹¹²³ Orderic Vitalis, XI, p. 68.

¹¹²⁴ During the siege, Bohemond was away from Otranto but I suppose that some sort of correspondence might have been exchanged between him and Contostephanus.

¹¹²⁵ *Alexiad*, XII, viii, vol. II, p. 170; Sewter, p. 391.

¹¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, XI, x-xi, vol. II, pp. 115-26; Sewter, pp. 360-4.

father had done in 1081, because this would have significantly helped him to secure his flanks.¹¹²⁷ After a failed attempt to take the city by surprise, Bohemond pitched his camp on the east of the city, probably close to the ruins of the ancient city of Epidamnos where Robert Guiscard had pitched his twenty-six years before. Thus, by late October 1107, Bohemond began laying down his plans and preparing different types of siege machines to breach the city's defences, while his troops occupied the castles of Mylus and Petroula on the banks of the River Diabolis.¹¹²⁸

The Emperor, having been alerted a few weeks before, he set out from the capital to Thessaloniki on the 6th November 1107,¹¹²⁹ crossing the River Euros (Maritsa) a few days later and arriving at the Macedonian capital to spend the winter probably on the last days of the month. While Alexius was on his way to Thessaloniki, Anna Comnena describes how he was eagerly drilling his army to march properly as a coherent unit and perform certain basic battle formations.¹¹³⁰ Also, sometime in early December, a naval squadron of unknown size arrived from Venice under the Doge Ordelafo Falier, in accordance with the treaty that was drawn in 1082.¹¹³¹ But most importantly, the local levies refused access further inland to the foraging parties of the Norman army, strongly defending the mountain and coastal passes. "Hence came famine which continually affected horses and men alike. Bohemond's army also suffered from dysentery; it was apparently caused by some unsuitable diet, but the truth is that this countless, invincible multitude was visited by the wrath of God, and they died like flies."¹¹³²

Bohemond made no further serious attempts to take the city before the coming of the spring, while Alexius was spending the winter in Thessaloniki gathering fresh recruits. When

¹¹²⁷ *Anon. Bar.*, s.a. 1107; William of Tyre, XI. 6, p. 471; *Alexiad*, XII. ix, vol. II, p. 172; Sewter, pp. 392-3.

¹¹²⁸ Fulcherius Carnotensis, p. 521; *Alexiad*, XIII. ii, vol. II, p. 183; Sewter, p. 399.

¹¹²⁹ *Alexiad*, XIII. i, vol. II, p. 177; Sewter, p. 395.

¹¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, XIII. ii, vol. II, pp. 182-3; Sewter, pp. 398-9.

¹¹³¹ Dandolus, *Chronicon*, s.a. 1107, pp. 223-4; Nicol, *Byzantium and Venice*, p. 64.

¹¹³² *Alexiad*, XIII. ii, vol. II, pp. 185-6; Sewter, p. 400.

the spring of 1108 finally arrived, the Norman leader burned his ships¹¹³³ like his father had done twenty-six years before and vigorously pressed on with the siege, bringing in front of the city's defences every siege machine his engineers could build. Anna Comnena has given us a brief account of the siege machines used by Robert Guiscard in 1081, namely *belfries* (wooden siege-towers), but in this second siege of Dyrrachium she devotes a relatively large part of her thirteenth book to describe in much detail the construction, use and eventually destruction or failure of each of these machines used against the city of Dyrrachium in the spring of 1108. But before we have a look on what Anna has to say, it is worth mentioning in brief the history of these machines of this period.¹¹³⁴ Perhaps the biggest and most dangerous of them was the *belfry*, a multi-storey wooden siege tower moving on wheels or rollers, protected from the enemy by thick hides. It had to be made at least a storey taller than the walls so that the besiegers could lower the drawbridges or jump into the ramparts of the wall. It can be seen in Western Europe at least since the tenth century, with the Normans also using it in southern Italy in the mid-eleventh century. It was undoubtedly of Roman origin, with Vegetius, the anonymous author of the *On Strategy*, Leo VI and Cecaumenos giving a description of a tower in their works, along with ways to be set on fire.¹¹³⁵ Undermining the city's walls was a very common way of trying to break through the city's defences, and it usually involved two methods. First, we had the miners who were called to undermine the foundations of the walls by digging with picks and chisels. And since these vulnerable workers had to be protected, we also had the "armoured sheds" or wooden roofs. These were

¹¹³³ Anna specifically talks about the cargo and horse-transport ships: *Alexiad*, XIII. ii, vol. II, p. 184; Sewter, p. 399.

¹¹³⁴ The basic works for this topic are: Foss, Winfield, *Byzantine Fortifications*; E. McGeer, "Byzantine Siege Warfare in Theory and Practice", *The Medieval City under Siege*, ed. I. A. Corfis and M. Wolfe, Boydell, Woodbridge, 1995, 123-29; D. Sullivan, "Tenth Century Byzantine Offensive Siege Warfare: Instructional Prescriptions and Historical Practice", *Byzantium at War (9th-12th c.)*, 179-200; Nicolle, *Crusader Warfare*, vol. I, pp. 117-8, 213-8.

¹¹³⁵ Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, IV. 17, 18, pp. 130-1; "On Strategy", 13. 1-135, pp. 36-42; Leo VI, *Tactica*, XV. 30; Cecaumenos, pp. 30-1.

constructed by light wood and protected from enemy shots and fire by hides. A second impressive siege machine was the battering-ram or the so-called “tortoise”. This was a wooden construction, usually parallelogram but it could have been triangular as well, moving on wheels with an iron-tipped head that was slung from a framework of beams and projected against the city-walls. Again, both Vegetius and Leo describe these aforementioned methods of undermining the curtain walls in much detail, along with the appropriate counter-measures taken by the defenders.¹¹³⁶

The *Alexiad* narrates quite vividly the three attempts made by the Normans to capture Dyrrachium using several besieging methods.¹¹³⁷ First, Bohemond brought in front of the city’s walls, on the east side facing the lagoon, a battering-ram. From this description of the attack we understand that the city of Dyrrachium probably lacked a motte, if the defenders were to approach the walls so easily. Although this was against the advice given by the contemporary military manuals of the Byzantines,¹¹³⁸ moats – with or without water – are rarely found in either the early or the later Byzantine period and other outer defence works are even rarer.¹¹³⁹ But it certainly must have been futile for the Normans to force a crack on the walls of Dyrrachium if we remember the exaggerating comment by Anna Comnena concerning the walls which were “of considerable thickness, so wide indeed that more than four horsemen can ride abreast in safety.” The Normans also attempted to undermine the city’s walls by digging a tunnel on the northern side of the city. But immediately a counter-mine was dug to repel the Normans by shooting Greek fire at them.¹¹⁴⁰ Finally, Bohemond resulted in building an enormous wooden siege-tower, and once the defenders realised that they could not burn the tower down by shooting Greek fire directly at it, they came up with

¹¹³⁶ Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, IV. 13-5, 21-2, pp. 127-8, 132-4; Leo VI, *Tactica*, XV. 31, 33; for the siege warfare techniques by the Byzantines in the era of the “Reconquest” and the contemporary military manuals, see: McGeer, “Byzantine Siege Warfare”, 123-9.

¹¹³⁷ *Alexiad*, XIII. iii, vol. II, pp. 186-93; Sewter, pp. 400-4.

¹¹³⁸ McGeer, “Byzantine Siege Warfare”, 123-9.

¹¹³⁹ *Castrorum Circumnavigatio*, p. 28.

¹¹⁴⁰ “On Strategy”, 13. 34-40, p. 38.

the idea of filling in the space between the walls and the tower with any flammable material they could find and they set it on fire.

In the meantime Alexius left Thessaloniki for Dyrrachium in the early spring, and he pitched his camp at the River Diabolis just a couple of weeks later.¹¹⁴¹ Unfortunately, Anna Comnena does not give any figures concerning Alexius Comnenus' army or any specific information about its consistency. From the *Narrative of Fleuri* we get the figure of 60,000 men,¹¹⁴² while Albert of Aachen talks about 10,000 men,¹¹⁴³ estimations which are far from the reasonable figures for an army of the period. Throughout Anna's narrative, however, we get an idea of the different nationalities that had gathered under the Imperial banner of the Comneni. That included Greeks (probably from Macedonia and Thrace), Alans, Seljuc Turks, Turcoples, Patzinaks and Cumans.¹¹⁴⁴ The Cumans were nomads from southern Russia, probably from the same Turkic ethnic background as the Patzinaks, employed by Constantinople since they were defeated in battle in 1094.¹¹⁴⁵ The Patzinaks were well-known mercenaries serving under the Byzantines and it is not surprising that they took part in the 1107-8 campaign. After their defeat at Mt-Levounion in 1091, a number of them were settled in the areas of eastern and central Macedonia guarding the approaches to Thessaloniki.¹¹⁴⁶ In addition, as it had happened in the summer of 1081, Alexius asked for troops from Malik-Shah of Ikonion, with whom he renewed the old treaties that had been signed by his predecessors Sulleyman I (1077-86), Abul-Kasim (1086-92) and Kilij-Arslan I (1092-

¹¹⁴¹ *Alexiad*, XIII. iv, vol. II, p. 193; Sewter, p. 404.

¹¹⁴² *Narratio Floriacensis de captis Antiochia et Hierosolyma*, R.H.C. Oc. vol. 5, p. 361.

¹¹⁴³ Albert of Aachen, X. 42, p. 756.

¹¹⁴⁴ *Alexiad*, XIII. v-viii, vol. II, pp. 199-217; Sewter, pp. 408-13; Albert of Aachen, X. 42, p. 756.

¹¹⁴⁵ Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, vol. II, pp. 24-5; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, p. 360.

¹¹⁴⁶ Vasiliev, *Byzantine Empire*, vol. II, p. 25 ; Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, p. 360; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 132-4.

1107).¹¹⁴⁷ What is most striking, however, is the absence of the Varangian Guard from Anna's account. Why would Alexius have left his personal guard in Constantinople? Perhaps, since he had finalised his plans for a land blockade he knew that his Varangian heavy infantry units would have been of limited use against the Norman knights in the Dyrrachian terrain. But this is just speculation.

Having learned a valuable lesson at Dyrrachium twenty-six years before, and perhaps because he did not have any opposition to his plans like in 1081, when he followed the advice of his younger and more hot-headed officers – this time, his officers were all veterans of the 1081 campaign and had dealt with the crusaders as well – Alexius' plan was not to risk another pitched battle. He had already instructed his local troops to control the passes that led beyond the vicinity of Dyrrachium, thus denying the Normans the chance to conduct any foraging further inland. Now that the main army had arrived to deal with Bohemond's invasion, it was time to tighten the blockade to a point when the Normans would seek for peace.¹¹⁴⁸ It seems remarkable how the Byzantine generalship had adapted itself against the same enemy that had faced in battle a quarter of a century before, with the First Crusade certainly providing some useful lessons on how to deal with western European knights. Anna attempts to explain to her readers the deeper reasons behind her father's decision to adapt his plans and not to offer Bohemond a battle, which clearly shows a combination of Vegetian thinking and influence from Leo's *Tactica*: "For reasons already mentioned, despite the fact that he [Alexius] was most impatient for war, he acknowledged the rule of reason in everything and his desire was to conquer Bohemond by another method. The general (I think) should not invariably seek victory by drawing the sword; there are times when he should be prepared to use finesse and so achieve a complete triumph. So far as we know, a general's supreme task is to win, not merely by force of arms, sometimes, when the chance offers itself,

¹¹⁴⁷ Ostrogorsky, *Byzantine State*, pp. 360-1; Angold, *The Byzantine Empire*, pp. 134-5; Cahen, *The Formation of Turkey*, pp. 7-15.

¹¹⁴⁸ *Alexiad*, XIII. iv, vol. II, p. 194; Sewter, pp. 404-5.

an enemy can be beaten by fraud.”¹¹⁴⁹ Alexius also had the most suitable troops for the strategy he wished to follow, meaning expert lightly-armed horse-archers like the Seljuks, the Turcoples, the Patzinaks and the Cumans who were unaccustomed to the Norman way of fighting on horseback and, thus, unlikely to be able to resist the impetus of a heavy Norman cavalry charge. These troops were much more suitable for a war of attrition and it was exactly that kind of strategy that was chosen by the Byzantines.

Another point that highlights Alexius’ experience and tactical adaptation was his summoning of three “westerners” who had defected to the Byzantine Army in previous years, one of them certainly a veteran of the 1081 Norman invasion of Illyria and Greece.¹¹⁵⁰ He was Peter of Aulps, a senior commander of the Norman army in Robert Guiscard’s campaign of 1081 who joined the Imperial Army while at Antioch, in June 1098. The two others were Marinus Sebastus, a noble from Naples and a certain Roger, himself a Frankish noble as well.¹¹⁵¹ It is difficult to track any possible links between Marinus, Roger and Bohemond and, indeed, if they had ever met the Norman count in person. But they, along with Peter of Aulps, certainly were familiar with the Frankish battle-tactics and the things that could spread discord among a western army. The crucial move was to win over Bohemond’s senior commanders by sending a number of trusted servants to Bohemond’s officers – his younger brother Guy of Conversano,¹¹⁵² Richard of Salerno, Richard of Principate and a certain Coprisianus – carrying treacherous letters as though in response to ones supposedly having been sent to the Emperor, thus hoping that they would fall in Bohemond’s hands and spread dissension in his army.¹¹⁵³ We have already seen this tactic been dictated by Emperor Leo VI in his *Tactica* and the influence from this early tenth century work is more than obvious at

¹¹⁴⁹ Ibid., XIII. iv, vol. II, pp. 194-5; Sewter, p. 405.

¹¹⁵⁰ Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, III. 9, p. 84-85.

¹¹⁵¹ *Alexiad*, XIII. iv, vol. II, p. 195; Sewter, pp. 405-6.

¹¹⁵² We have to remember that Guy was in Imperial service during the First Crusade, escorting the Emperor at Philomelium while the Crusaders were besieging Antioch.

¹¹⁵³ *Alexiad*, XIII. iv, vol. II, p. 195; Sewter, p. 406; compare with Leo VI, *Tactica*, XVIII. 80-101.

this point.¹¹⁵⁴ Bohemond, however, took no actions against his officers with a number of western sources, and especially Orderic Vitalis, being keen to accuse Guy and Robert de Montford of having collaborated with the Emperor.¹¹⁵⁵ But why these allegations were not made by Anna herself, always willing to write about the Frankish duplicity and avarice? Probably because this was for the Latin chroniclers the most convenient explanation for the failure of the campaign and the humiliating Treaty of Devol.

In the meantime, Anna Comnena notes her father's next moves in tightening the blockade around the Norman camp at Dyrrachium. She tells us that he sent for four of his most able and trusted officers Michael Cecaumenos, Alexander Cabasilas, Leo Niceritas and Eustathios Kamytzes to occupy Avlona, Kanina and Hiericho, Petrula, Deura and Arbanum respectively.¹¹⁵⁶ I have mentioned earlier that, even though this was not noted down by Anna, the first three of the aforementioned castles must have been occupied by the Normans since their landing at Avlona in October 1107. It is quite possible that Anna was not aware of that and these officers were actually sent to control the mountain passes leading to the castles and not the castles themselves, especially when she mentions the *xyloklasiai* (ξύλοκλασίαι), the road-blocks made from felled timber that were used to block the passes.¹¹⁵⁷

Bohemond's reaction to the tightening of the land blockade was to send his younger brother Guy, a certain count called Saracenus (of Arab origin perhaps?) and another count called Pagan, with a significant force to attack Alexius' commanders. Anna Comnena reports that Kamytzes' men were caught in the middle of two Norman units and were overwhelmingly defeated, although we have no exact figures of the casualties on both sides (5th April 1108),¹¹⁵⁸ while Alyates, either because he had heard of the encirclement of Kamytzes' troops or while conducting a reconnaissance of the area, he was also engaged in

¹¹⁵⁴ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XX. 29.

¹¹⁵⁵ Orderic Vitalis, XI. p. 102; Albert of Aachen, X. 44, p. 758.

¹¹⁵⁶ *Alexiad*, XIII. v, vol. II, p. 199; Sewter, p. 408.

¹¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XIII. v, vol. II, p. 199; Sewter, p. 408.

¹¹⁵⁸ *Alexiad*, XIII. v, vol. II, p. 200; Sewter, pp. 408-9; there is a detailed description of the battle in the: *Narratio Floriacensis*, p. 361.

the *mêlée*. With two of his senior officers out of action along with their units, Alexius summoned Cantacuzenos and dispatched him to Glabinitza along with a significant number of reinforcements.

Having re-established his position on the right of the River Charzanes, Cantacuzenos now had to fight Guy's forces, after the latter had sent a number of his men at Hiericho and Canina and inflicted a defeat on Cecaumenos, the commander of the aforementioned castles. In the upcoming battle, Cantacuzenos commanded the centre of the formation, having given the right wing to the Alans and the left to the Seljuks, while the Patzinaks were ordered to advance and harass the Normans with volleys and arrows using their feigned retreat tactics in an attempt to break their tight formation. With the Patzinak attacks bringing no result, the Normans were then attacked, initially by the Turks of the left flank and later by the Alans from the right, but both of the attacks were checked. However, the centre of the Byzantine Army, commanded by Cantacuzenos, made a final frontal attack on the Norman centre and managed to break their formation and force them to retreat back to the castle at Mylos. We have very little information about the number of Norman troops that were engaged in this confrontation, with Albert of Aachen talking about 300 mounted troops and 500 foot soldiers, a quite reasonable number for a small-scale battle.¹¹⁵⁹ No indication about the number of Byzantine numbers or casualties is given.

The victory of Cantacuzenos certainly boosted the morale of his men and made the situation even more desperate for Bohemond who was seeing his supplies running low day after day. His only choice was to order a plundering expedition in the area of Avlona, Kanina and Hiericho where he hoped that he would catch the Byzantines off guard. Cantacuzenos, who had replaced Cecaumenos as commander of the Avlona, Kanina and Hiericho area, was not surprised by this Norman expedition and he dispatched a strong force under a certain Veroites that managed to route them.¹¹⁶⁰ A second expeditionary force was sent by Bohemond, this time 6,000 men strong of both infantry and cavalry, again hoping to catch the

¹¹⁵⁹ Albert of Aachen, X. 43, pp. 756-8; *Alexiad*, XIII. vi, vol. II, p. 205; Sewter, p. 411.

¹¹⁶⁰ *Alexiad*, XIII. vi, vol. II, p. 206; Sewter, p. 412.

Byzantines unprepared for battle and overrun them. In this battle, Cantacuzenos waited for the Norman army to reach a halt at River Bouses for all the necessary preparations to cross the river, and at that time when the Normans were most vulnerable he made his move.¹¹⁶¹ No details are given for this battle, but its result would have certainly been disastrous for the Normans. The Byzantine general applied his tactic of attacking an enemy when crossing a river and, thus, being in a much vulnerable position, for a second consecutive time which indicates his vast experience in laying ambushes as a general commanding small units of cavalry.¹¹⁶²

After several attempts by the Emperor to strengthen the land blockade and placing Marianus Mavrokatalon at the head of the naval forces patrolling the Illyrian waters – after the failure of the Contostephanoi to prevent reinforcements reaching the Normans from Apulia – ¹¹⁶³ the conditions on Bohemond’s camp were starting to feel almost intolerable. At this stage of the blockade, the Byzantine units deployed in the passes leading to the Norman camp were given orders not just to prevent the Normans from foraging and gathering supplies but to harass them by applying certain guerrilla tactics.¹¹⁶⁴ Further, an advice passed on to his troops by the Emperor, exactly the same as twenty-six years ago, was to shoot the arrows not at the Norman knights but rather at their horses which were much more vulnerable, because “the Kelts, when they dismounted, would be easily handled.”¹¹⁶⁵ But Alexius had serious doubts about the loyalty of some of his men and officers and, thus, staying faithful to his strategy which had brought him ample result so far he did not risk a pitched battle with the embattled Normans, even at this stage, but rather “sat back like a spectator, watching what was happening on the plains of Illyria.” In addition, much useful information about the

¹¹⁶¹ Ibid., XIII. vi, vol. II, p. 207; Sewter, p. 412.

¹¹⁶² Vegetius recognizes the danger of an ambush on a river crossing and urges a commander to place armed guards and even construct temporary timber fortifications. See: Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, III. 7, p. 79.

¹¹⁶³ *Alexiad*, XIII. vii, vol. II, p. 210-12; Sewter, p. 414-15 .

¹¹⁶⁴ Ibid., XIII. viii, vol. II, pp. 212-3; Sewter, p. 415.

¹¹⁶⁵ Ibid., XIII. viii, vol. II, p. 214; Sewter, p. 416.

conditions in the Norman camp and the degree of desperation was brought to the Emperor by the several Norman deserters who were leaving their camp, either alone or in small bands, and were received by Alexius with gifts and titles and then sent on their way.¹¹⁶⁶

Bohemond was eventually persuaded by his senior officers to seek a way out of this deadlock that the siege of Dyrrachium and the Byzantine blockade represented and open negotiations with the Emperor.¹¹⁶⁷ A number of Byzantine dignitaries were demanded by the Norman Count as hostages and the negotiations eventually took place at some short distance from the camp, so that the Byzantines would not experience firsthand the miserable condition in Bohemond's camp.¹¹⁶⁸ After receiving permission from the Byzantine dignitaries to move his camp in a more salubrious spot in the immediate vicinity of the city of Dyrrachium and allowing some brief communication between the Byzantines and the governor of the city, Alexius Comnenus, Bohemond was allowed to visit the Emperor in his imperial tent and agree to a treaty that was to seal the end of the former's designs and ambitions against the Byzantine Empire.

The Treaty of Devol (September 1108) – Its significance and the aftermath

The Treaty of Devol was drawn eleven years after Bohemond had become *homo ligius* of the Emperor in Constantinople, in the month of September 1108, and the *Alexiad* is once more our most detailed and reliable source. Two documents were drawn. The first, signed by Bohemond and given to Alexius which includes a statement with the former's obligations towards the Emperor, was preserved in the Imperial archives and copied by Anna. The second document, a *chrysobull* that was written by Alexius for Bohemond which incorporated the grants given to the latter has been lost, but some parts of it were reconstructed in the *Alexiad*.

¹¹⁶⁶ Ibid., XIII. viii, vol. II, p. 215; Sewter, p. 417; Albert of Aachen, X. 44, p. 758.

¹¹⁶⁷ *Narratio Floriacensis*, p. 362.

¹¹⁶⁸ *Alexiad*, XIII. ix, vol. II, p. 216; Sewter, p. 418.

Much has been written about the Treaty of Devol and there is no need to go into further analysis of its clauses and obligations for each party.¹¹⁶⁹ The fundamental part of the entire treaty is what follows the annulment of the 1097 pact: “By the terms of this second pact I shall become the *liege-man* (*λίχιος άνθρωπος*) of Your Highnesses.” This time in writing, Bohemond would become the vassal of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius and of his son and successor John,¹¹⁷⁰ and by the terms of this feudal contract he was to provide military support to all the enemies of the Byzantine Empire. Another significant clause of the treaty had to do with the future of the Patriarchate of Antioch which was to return to the jurisdiction of Constantinople, with John the Oxite who was the Greek-Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch been restored. Finally, there is a huge list of cities and surrounding areas which were either given to Bohemond as a fief or were introduced into the Empire, the detailed mentioning of which is not necessary for our analysis. In brief, Bohemond received Antioch and many of its surrounding areas, while several other territories that surrounded this newly formed principality were incorporated into the Empire, like almost all of Cilicia and the coastal cities of Laodicea, Jabala, Valania, Maraclea and Tortosa into northern Lebanon.¹¹⁷¹

If we examine the exact areas of Syria that were given to Bohemond, we have to say that for someone who appeared to have been defeated and humiliated, Bohemond did receive

¹¹⁶⁹ *Alexiad*, XIII. xii, vol. II, pp. 228-46; Sewter, pp. 424-33; for further reading on the Treaty of Devol, see: Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, pp. 127-30; Lilie, *Byzantium and the Crusader States*, pp. 75-82; Chalandon, *Alexis Ier*, pp. 246-9; Harris, *Byzantium and the Crusades*, pp. 79-80; Savvides, *Byzantino-Normannica*, pp. 79-81.

¹¹⁷⁰ John was twenty-one years old and he is constantly mentioned in the treaty as *basileus*, a title which Heraclius (610-41) received for himself and also gave to his son and co-Emperor and it was held by all co-Emperors ever since. This was certainly an attempt by Alexius to secure his newly-founded Imperial House. See: I. Shahid, “The Iranian Factor in Byzantium during the Reign of Heraclius”, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 26 (1972), 293-320; a basic article on the imperial titles and related problems: L. Bréhier, “L’ origine des titres impériaux à Byzance”, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 15 (1906), 161-78.

¹¹⁷¹ There has been an appendix put at the ending of the Treaty at the request of Bohemond who asked for a number of cities and territories as compensation for those that had been divided from Antioch. See: *Alexiad*, XIII. xii, vol. II, pp. 242-3; Sewter, p. 432 .

plenty. But why was he given these specific areas and for what purpose? What Alexius would have expected was the establishment of a new principality which would have worked as a “buffer-state” against mainly the surrounding Muslim states of Mesopotamia and the Fatimids of Egypt and it could have significantly disrupted the Seljuc communications between Ikonion and Mesopotamia, especially with the addition of Edessa and Aleppo. He must have been aware that the Kingdom of Jerusalem would not have been able to hold out for long and possibly he could have taken a further step and expand the vassal state of Antioch further south. Again, these are only speculations but we cannot accept that Alexius would have made so many concessions to Bohemond without expecting something in return in the long-run. However, what the Treaty of Devol had certainly earned Alexius was a vassal, and a well paid one indeed since he would earn 200 gold pounds as an annual income and the title of *sebastos*,¹¹⁷² who would have had his base at a most strategic region for the Empire, be a much valued source of renown warriors, direct the expansion of his lands further to the east against Aleppo and Edessa and act as a buffer-zone for Imperial Cilicia and the Taurus. This task would have certainly overstretched the military mechanism of the Byzantine Empire, if we bear in mind the serious danger that the Seljuks of Ikonion posed to the safety of their communications and supplies. As long as the Empire was fully recognised as the suzerain of Syria and especially of Antioch, and all the Greek-Orthodox clergy was restored, Alexius’ task had succeeded.

Alexius was, however, destined to be let down by Bohemond once more. His promises became a dead letter once he left Illyria, not for Antioch, but for Apulia where he died, probably in March 1111.¹¹⁷³ Tancred, the Count of Taranto’s nephew and successor in the Principality of Antioch, proved a match for his uncle and a very “stubborn” and persistent thorn in the Empire’s expansion to the East, at least until his death in 1112. He never materialised his uncle’s promises and he demonstrated great arrogance and defiance towards

¹¹⁷² *Alexiad*, XIV. i., vol. II, p. 248; Sewter, p. 435.

¹¹⁷³ For the debate on Bohemond’s death and the different dates given by a number of Latin sources, see: Yewdale, *Bohemond I*, p. 133.

Alexius' envoys in Antioch.¹¹⁷⁴ The fact remains, however, that one of the most prominent enemies of the Empire for almost three decades had now died. It would take another century for a Crusader army to finally reach and conquer the City of Cities and the bulwark of Eastern Christendom.

¹¹⁷⁴ *Alexiad*, XIV. ii., vol. II, pp. 253-7; Sewter, pp. 438-40.

Conclusions

The Norman infiltration in the Italian Peninsula can be viewed as the story of a few hundred men who descended to Italy to make career for themselves as mercenaries, literally matching the term “soldiers of fortune”. These people were predominantly Norman, as most of our sources highlight, but recent studies have shown that perhaps even a third of them were immigrants from regions neighbouring Normandy, like Maine, Anjou and Brittany. And we should expect that they would attempt to introduce in Italy an administrative system based on their own experience from back home, influenced no doubt by the forms of lord-vassal relations, and the customs of tenure, military service and inheritance established in Normandy and other parts of France in the previous decades. The political and social background of southern Italy was ideal for them, with the politically fragmented Lombard principalities, the Byzantine Catepans, great ecclesiastical institutions and even the German Emperors being more than willing to get these fine cavalrymen into their service. But we should draw a sharp distinction between the pre-Civitate period and what followed after the battle at the River Fortone in 1053. Civitate should be viewed as a pivotal moment in Italian medieval history, for the simple reason that it established the Normans as major players in the political arena of Italy. For the first four decades up to Civitate, the Normans were serving in the Lombard rebel armies as elite cavalry units in a clearly auxiliary role, numbering just a few hundred and thus unable to greatly influence Italian politics. It was only after the late 1050s when the major Norman expansion in mainland Apulia, Calabria and Sicily begins to take shape.

As I have already mentioned, we believe that the Normans would have attempted to apply to Italy the basic principles of the administrative system they had experienced in pre-Conquest Normandy, even though there are no firm evidence in any charter or primary material that would confirm this assumption. Thus, it would probably have been stipendiary troops – both household and mercenary – that would have played a protagonist role in the territorial expansions of the Norman principalities in mainland Apulia, Calabria and Sicily throughout the 1050s-70s. In addition, military service from vassals and fideles would have

been requested by the Duke of Apulia for large-scale operations which included, of course, the Illyrian expedition of 1081. However, well-established feudal quotas did not exist by that early period of the Norman infiltration in the south and we know from the number of serious rebellions that took place between 1067-82 that this demand would not have gone down without any protests from the part of senior Apulian magnates, since they did not consider themselves to be holding their lands as ducal grants. And these institutions like the *arrière-ban* and the *service d'host* had significant geographical and time limitations as well. That is why Robert Guiscard would almost certainly have negotiated the terms of overseas service with his senior vassals when he called for the *arrière-ban* in 1081, following a similar pattern with William II in 1066.

The period of the eleventh century after the death of Basil II in 1025 is characterised by the serious decline of the Byzantine army. The rising power of the landed aristocracy of Asia Minor and its struggle for power with the senior civil servants in the capital had caused the military lands of the provinces to disappear and the thematic levies (*stratiotai*) to be turned into dependants or to be given the right to buy off their military service, thus eroding the foundations of the oldest military institution of the Imperial Army since the seventh century. This, along with budget cuts in the middle of the century led the central government to gradually replace indigenous troops with foreign mercenaries from the west, like German *Nemitzoi*, Anglo-Saxon *Varangians*, Frankish knights and Venetian seamen, and from neighbouring countries, like Seljuk Turks, *Patzinaks*, Rus and Armenians. But the inadequacy of this system was proved at *Matzikert* in 1071, when the numerically superior but heterogeneous and undisciplined army of Diogenes IV was defeated by Alp-Arslan. Thus by 1081, the old thematic system was dead and the tagmatic armies had been significantly reduced in numbers due to the civil strifes of the period and the economic decline. In 1081, Alexius Comnenus resorted to hiring even more mercenaries to deal with Robert Guiscard's invasion, thus the crisis in the Imperial treasury in that year. Later in his reign he made bold steps to introduce strong and centralised land and naval armies and reunite the civilian and military authorities of the provinces under an army officer (*duke-katepano*). Also,

smallholders were settled in rural areas of the Empire with the obligation to provide military service. So, the army that the Emperor led against Bohemond in 1108 was very different in structure and composition than twenty-seven years before. Foreign mercenaries were, indeed, the core of the army but we can also find many units of indigenous troops which were organised into battalions that resembled the old tagmatic structure and bore the name of their place of origin.

In the view of the wider debate between modern scholars like C.J. Rogers, J. Gillingham and S. Morillo about the term “Vegetian Strategy”, I will attempt to give an answer to what degree we can characterise the Norman and Byzantine strategies in Italy, Sicily and the Balkans as Vegetian.¹¹⁷⁵ By the term “Vegetian Strategy” scholars have identified a particular type of warfare in which the commander sought to avoid battle at all costs except if the chances were overwhelmingly in his favour. Instead he was to seek to defeat his enemy by other means such as the use of fortifications, harassment and blockade.¹¹⁷⁶ First, I wish to focus to Italy in the post-Civitate period, characterised by the territorial expansion of the Norman principalities and a marked absence of any major battles. A basic principle that we have to keep in mind is that the party who wanted to expand and conquer – the aggressor – would often be more willing to seek a decisive battle, while the party already controlling these territories – the defender – would wish to deny his enemy doing that. In post-Civitate Italy we can easily identify who was the aggressor and who was defending the territories of Apulia and Calabria. But why did no major battles take place? We would expect the Normans, operating close to their bases, conscious of their numerical inferiority and certainly short of cash to avoid pitched battles and focus on the piecemeal conquest of towns in mainland Apulia. And that is what they did, perhaps because of the paucity of their numbers and the difficulties of being reinforced, but also for an additional reason, namely that a major

¹¹⁷⁵ Gillingham, “Richard I and the Science of War”, 78-91; “Up with Orthodoxy!”, 149-58; Morillo, “The Context and Limits of Vegetian Strategy”, 21-41; Rogers, “The Vegetian ‘Science of Warfare’”, 1-19.

¹¹⁷⁶ Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, III. 9, 22, 26, pp. 83-86, 108-10, 116-17.

battle would probably not have achieved anything due to the high number of fortified sites in Apulia. By the late 1050s, the Byzantines had to rely on the local levies and some elite troops furnished from the mainland, with expensive expeditions like the 1025 and 1038 Sicilian campaigns being a distant memory. Asia Minor was a far more important operational theatre for the central government and the Catepans of Longobardia had to go on the defensive, thus locking themselves up in their fortified cities. Whether Guiscard knew about this situation from the Frankish mercenaries serving in the Imperial army in Asia Minor is quite possible, but not certain.

Numerous similarities can be identified between two other operational theatres, Sicily and Illyria, where the Normans also appeared as the aggressors. In both cases they operated far from their home-bases, with no substantial reinforcements and having to rely on plundering expeditions, primarily to supply their armies and to undermine the political authority of their enemies. The Normans were also aware of the political fragmentation of Sicily into three contesting emirates, while the civil conflicts on the opposite side of the Adriatic would also have been known to Guiscard. Further, they had clear strategic objectives, Palermo and the second largest city of the Empire – Thessaloniki. Considering the aforementioned facts, we can understand why the Normans wished to engage their enemies in battle. And although numerically inferior to both their enemies, their aim was to achieve a victory that would have had significant consequences on the enemy's morale by winning the field from its leaders. But even victories in the field could not necessarily bring progress in an operational theatre, as Castrogiovanni (1061) and Cerami (1063) demonstrate. After the conquest of Palermo in 1072, the Muslims defended themselves in their numerous fortified sites, with the Normans finally expelling the last Muslim garrison in the Val di Noto only in 1091.

If we focus specifically on the Balkan operations, then Dyrrachium is a characteristic example of what I just mentioned, a victory of morale. Robert Guiscard was well aware of the numerical inferiority of his army, and with the city of Dyrrachium putting a stout resistance and the Norman navy unable to keep the communication and supply lines open with Italy, he desperately needed a victory in a pitched battle against a senior general or the Emperor

himself. Thus the result of the battle on the 18th October 1081 led to the surrender of the city of Dyrrachium, and within the following months the towns of Kastoria, Ioannina and Arta also capitulated to the Normans to escape devastation. This had clearly become a war of attrition in which the party which was more determined and with the greater resources would prevail. Alexius had to confiscate ecclesiastical objects to fund the raising of a mercenary army, and Guiscard had underestimated the stability of his domestic affairs in Italy. Thus, in the two years that followed Guiscard's departure for Italy in April 1082, Bohemond actively pursued battle by marching up and down the north-western Greek mainland, covering a great geographical area and targeting strategic cities that controlled the approaches to the Via Egnatia, even reaching as far east as the outskirts of Thessaloniki. However, even though Bohemond accepted the surrender of Byzantine towns, thus significantly undermining the Emperor's authority, no massacre of population or any serious devastation is reported by any of our contemporary chroniclers. Perhaps his plan was to secure the areas already under his control while waiting for his father to return from Italy with the necessary reinforcements. But the suppression of the Apulian rebellion and Guiscard's preoccupations in Rome took him more than two years, and it was this lack of money and provisions from Italy that proved fatal for the continuing of the Norman operations in Greece.

Alexius Comnenus experienced firsthand the main weapon of the Norman army at Dyrrachium, the heavy cavalry charge, and the effects of the Norman attack on Byzantine units after the Varangian Guard – the “protective shield” of the army – had been annihilated. But even though he further pursued a confrontation with the Normans at Ioannina, we can see the first signs of Alexius' resourcefulness already since the early summer of 1082. Because the Emperor did not have any units of heavy infantry to place in front of the rest of his army to repel the Norman cavalry attack, he instead placed a number of light chariots and caltrops. His “Vegetian strategy” became even more apparent during the siege of Larisa in 1083, for “he wished to lay an ambush there and so defeat the Latins by guile, for he had given up any

idea of open hand-to-hand conflict.”¹¹⁷⁷ Although his victory left the Norman army largely intact, Bohemond was forced to pull back to Dyrrachium because exhaustion and desertion were becoming endemic among his men; and it is likely that Alexius was aware of this from the deserters that had joined his army in the past months.

The same protagonists had the chance to meet each other on the outskirts of Dyrrachium twenty-four years later under very different circumstances. Bohemond had taken part in the First Crusade, having fought numerous times against Seljuc forces of the Sultanate of Rum and the Emirates of Aleppo and Mosul and learning valuable lessons on steppe battle-tactics and warfare. He was the undisputed leader of the Latins during the battles of Antioch and Harem and the commander of the vanguard that was ambushed by Kilij-Arslan at Doryleum a year earlier. He had experienced firsthand the charge of the Turkish horse-archers in great masses and their showers of arrows that were deadly accurate. He knew that any attempt to counterattack was doomed to fail because of the mobility and manoeuvrability of the Seljuc units, thus a combination of infantry units in-front of the cavalry would guarantee better protection for the vulnerable knights. The tactical error of dismissing the infantry and putting the cavalry in a single dense mass, a battle tactic that was seen at Doryleum was not repeated at Antioch, a fact that proves Bohemond’s strategic adaptability in the Middle-Eastern warfare. Further, the Norman count learned to take advantage of the topography of the battle-field to limit his enemy’s numerical superiority and likely use of any encircling tactics or, in the case of Harem, to place an ambush.

However, despite this invaluable experience that Bohemond had acquired in the Middle-East, he made the error of leaving the strategic initiative to the Byzantine Emperor when he invaded Illyria in 1107. The Norman count let his army to be drawn into a prolonged siege of the city of Dyrrachium that put a strain on his supplies and had a serious impact on the morale of his army. His choosing of the period for the invasion was also ill-thought, landing at Illyria in October, thus having only a few weeks to intensify his operations before having

¹¹⁷⁷ *Alexiad*, V. v, pp. 246-7; Sewter, p. 168-9.

to halt due to the coming of the winter, obviously not considering the great logistical task of getting supplies for the army in enemy territory. Alexius had also learned a lot from his previous experiences with the Normans and this time he carefully implemented the advice of Leo VI by his imposition of a blockade on Bohemond's army and the use of tricks to raise suspicion amongst senior Norman officers. He denied battle to the Normans and with the placing of reliable and disciplined units in the mountain passes that controlled the access in and out of the vicinity of Dyrrachium, he simply left hunger and discord to force the Norman army to surrender.

We do not know if the writings of Vegetius were known in Byzantium or if, indeed, they were read by Byzantine nobles in the capital. However, a cardinal distinction between the Byzantines and other cultures lies in the fact that they were writing down the useful knowledge gained in the battlefields during centuries of fighting against countless enemies. But all of the military handbooks of the period, from Maurice's *Strategicon* to Leo's *Tactica* and the writings of Cecaumenos argue repeatedly for the resort to battle only as the last option, and even then when the chances were overwhelmingly in favour of the commanding general. Whether or not officers of the eleventh century had access to these manuals is still debatable, although judging from the quotes taken from contemporary primary sources like the *Alexiad*, Cecaumenos' *Στρατηγικόν* and the *On Skirmishing* it seems highly likely. If that is the case, then why did Alexius Comnenus choose to offer the Normans battle in 1081 – exactly what they wanted – instead of imposing a blockade as in 1108? Probably he succumbed to the pressing demands of his younger and more hot-headed officers, who would have raised the matter of prestige for a usurper of a throne who was in power for less than six months.

This brings out a relatively neglected but extremely crucial issue about Byzantine warfare throughout the history of the Empire, from Theodosius I to the era of the Paleologoi. And this has to do with a specific doctrine that was passed on to the Byzantine officers by the ancient Greeks and the Roman tacticians through the writings of a number of military thinkers of the first and second centuries AD like Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, Onasander, Arian and

Aelian.¹¹⁷⁸ This was the doctrine of avoiding a pitched battle at any cost, engage in warfare of attrition, initial passive resistance to an invading force which had to be followed by continuous harassment, cutting off supplies and attack the enemy when at its most vulnerable state, such as on his way back loaded with booty and prisoners. Scholars like Ralph-Johannes Lilie, John Haldon and Warren Treadgold have highlighted the continuity of this doctrine on the part of the Byzantines when defending Asia Minor against the Arabs in the seventh and eighth centuries,¹¹⁷⁹ but these ideas and the general mentality becomes even more up-to-date when the Byzantines were fighting against the Turkish nomads three centuries later. And if I may conclude with a remark by Kaegi: “It is probable that the longevity of the Byzantine Empire owes very much to its adoption of a cautious military strategy that avoided bloody and risky pitched battles. Such battles did occur, but the tendency and prevailing policy was to try to avoid them.”¹¹⁸⁰

Another crucial question that comes out of my analyses so far is why did Robert Guiscard’s invasion of Illyria fail to establish a Norman principality in the Balkans, compared to William’s successful invasion of England fifteen years before? William II transported 7,000 men and 3,000 horses across the Channel in 1066,¹¹⁸¹ while Robert Guiscard would have had maybe even less than half – a number of cavalymen varying 700-1,300 which was

¹¹⁷⁸ Onasander, *Strategikos logos: Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, Onasander*, tr. by members of the Illinois Greek Club, W. Heinemann, New York, 1977; Kaegi compares an abstract from the first century AD Greek strategist Onasander with Maurice’s *Strategicon*. The similarities are, indeed, remarkable: Kaegi, “Byzantine Strategy”, 11-16.

¹¹⁷⁹ R.-J. Lilie, *Die Byzantinische Reaktion auf die Ausbreitung der Araber*, Munich, 1976; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, p. 37; J. Haldon, H. Kennedy, “The Arab-Byzantine Frontier in the Eighth and Ninth Centuries”, *Zbornik Radova, Srpska Akademija Nauka i Umetnosti*, Vizantoloski Institut, 19 (1980), 79-116; Haldon, *Warfare, State and Society*, pp. 34-46; Treadgold, “Byzantium, The Reluctant Warrior”, 209-33.

¹¹⁸⁰ Kaegi, “Byzantine Strategy”, 14.

¹¹⁸¹ These numbers are, of course, just estimates: Brown, *The Normans*, pp. 149-51; Oman, *The Art of War*, vol. I, p. 158; Beeler, *Warfare in England*, p. 12; Delbruck, *Medieval Warfare*, vol. III, p. 152.

wholly inadequate for such an undertaking. Second, Harold Godwineson was one of the victims of the battle of Hastings, a development of tremendous importance for the future of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom. At Dyrrachium, even though Alexius was hotly pursued and surrounded by the Normans, he managed to escape and establish a rallying point at Thessaloniki. His death would have definitely brought the Empire into the brink of a renewed civil war. Third, even though England was as heavily fortified as Illyria or Macedonia, the key point is that the decisive nature of the victory at Hastings and the rapid capitulation of the Anglo-Saxons saved William from having to besiege a number of burghs in a war of attrition that could have seriously crippled his forces.¹¹⁸² That was not the case for Robert Guiscard and even though Dyrrachium, Kastoria and Ioannina did capitulate to avoid any destruction by the vengeful Normans, there were plenty of fortified places in the Greek mainland that would certainly have resisted the invaders. Finally, the fate of William II and the new Norman aristocracy were closely associated, thus a great number of Norman lords eagerly supported the Duke on his invasion. But Robert Guiscard was nowhere near having the same level of support from his own vassal lords. In fact, the ringleaders of all the Apulian rebellions were senior Apulian lords – some of them related to Guiscard by blood – and it was a rebellion in April 1082 that forced the Duke to return to Italy, a significant turning point in the Illyrian expedition of 1081-83.

A final point that I wish to raise has to do with the Norman battle-tactics and their “invincibility” in the battlefield, with victory so often portrayed by our contemporary chroniclers as being promised to them by God. Writing in line with the argument first presented by Bates nearly three decades ago,¹¹⁸³ I would have to agree that the Normans do not exhibit any innovation in the battlefields of Normandy, England, Italy, Sicily or the Balkans. In all the cases they relied on the charge of their heavy cavalry units and the shock impact this would have had on their enemies, especially if they consisted of infantry levies, as

¹¹⁸² Strickland, “Military Technology and Conquest”, 372-73.

¹¹⁸³ Bates, *Normandy Before 1066*, 245-6.

in the cases of Civitate and Dyrrachium from the Mediterranean theatre.¹¹⁸⁴ But heavy cavalry attacks were common in Frankish warfare and the Normans simply implemented what they had experienced in France for decades. And we also have evidence that the Byzantines were well aware of the charge of the Frankish chivalry, judging by the writings of Leo VI.¹¹⁸⁵ This is the case for the feigned retreat as well, as the examples of Hastings and Messina demonstrate. But before we completely dismiss the Norman reputation for distinctive martial prowess, we have to ask whether it was by simply good fortune and strong leadership that a band of Norman bandits conquered half of the Italian peninsula and Sicily, in just half of a century, and seriously threatened the Byzantine Empire more than once? In the south, bands of Normans were employed by every rival camp precisely because they were the best. And they were the best because they depended on a strong leadership and unified command, along with a combination of elite mounted warriors, acting in co-ordination with recruited foot-soldiers, which were all supported, when necessary, by fleets.

¹¹⁸⁴ For purposes of comparison, see: Nicolle, “The Impact of European Couched Lance”, 6-40.

¹¹⁸⁵ Leo VI, *Tactica*, XVIII. 80-98.

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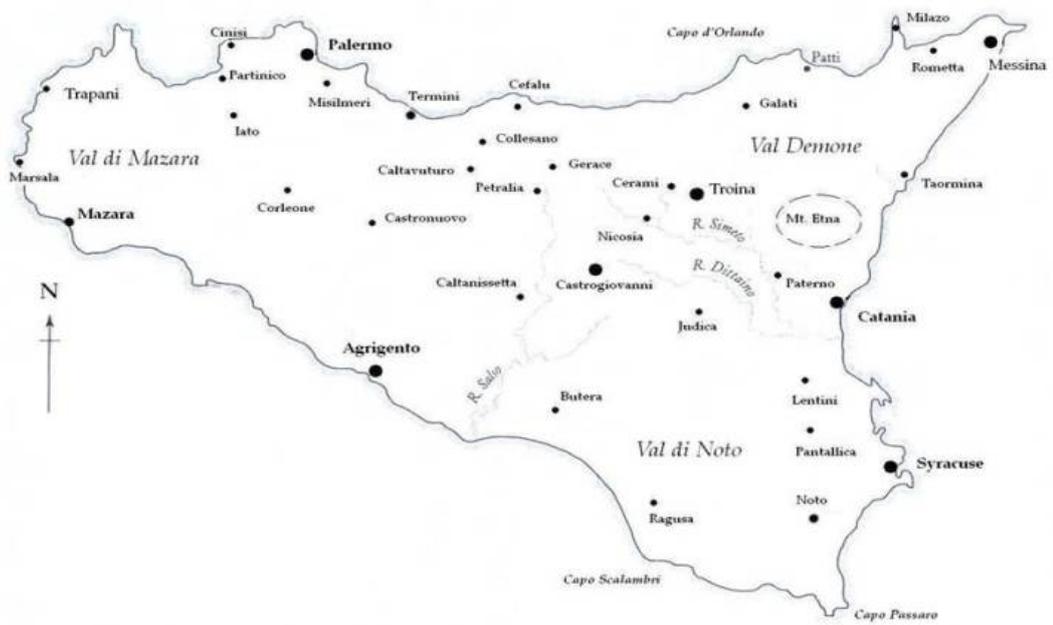
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**MAPS, PHOTOS
&
ILLUSTRATIONS**



The island of Sicily

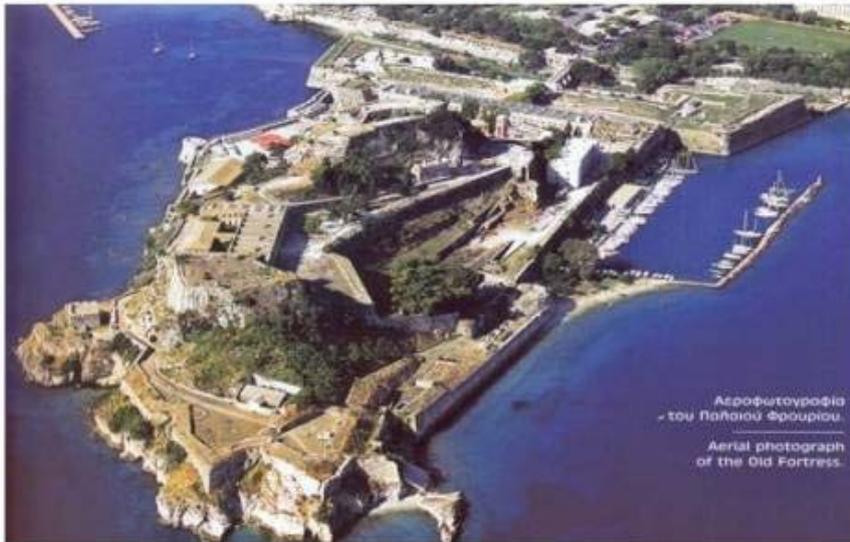


The Balkan peninsula.

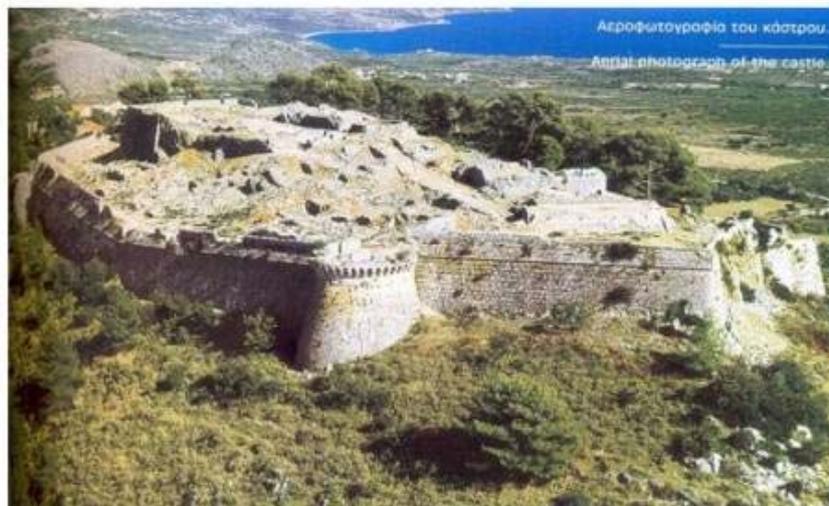


Asia Minor.

Nicaea: major city
Opsikian: theme



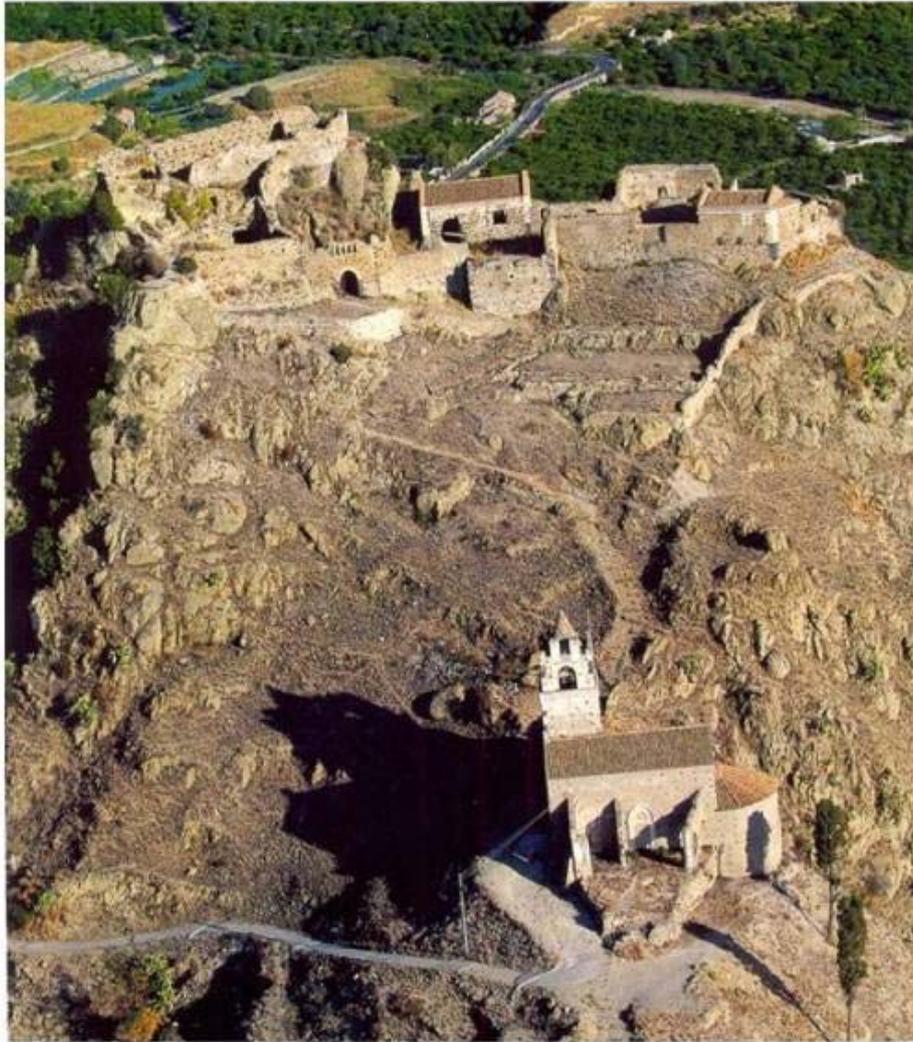
The old fortress of Corfu. The Castel Vecchio (or the old Tower facing the sea) was developed after the sixth century. The Castel Nuova (or the new Tower facing the town) was built during the Angevin occupation of the island (1267-1366).



The castle of St-George, the capital city of Cephalonia. It was built, probably in the eleventh century, in a strategic location in the south-east of the island.



The donjon at Paterno, west of Cefalù, begun by Roger I in 1073. It is one of the few such structures that has remained unchanged throughout the centuries.



The castle of the town of Celetablano, north-west of Catania, and together with the fortress of Taormina, protected the access to the Sicilian interior. The foundations of the castle are probably Arabic, while the Norman elements can be found in the summit. The residential buildings date from the Aragonese period.



The castle of Melfi.



A great sample of Muslim military architecture – The great ribat – military outpost – at Monastir, in Tunisia, constructed in 796 to defend against Byzantine ships.



The burning of the fleet of the rebel Thomas by the imperial Fleet. This illustration is of great importance because it is the only one that depicts Byzantine ships using Greek Fire. Also, note the wooden tower erected on the prow of the ship on the right. (Skylitze chronicle in Madrid, miniature 71, fol. 34v).



Hand-grenades for the use of Greek Fire. From the museum of the fortress of Chanie, Crete (tenth century).

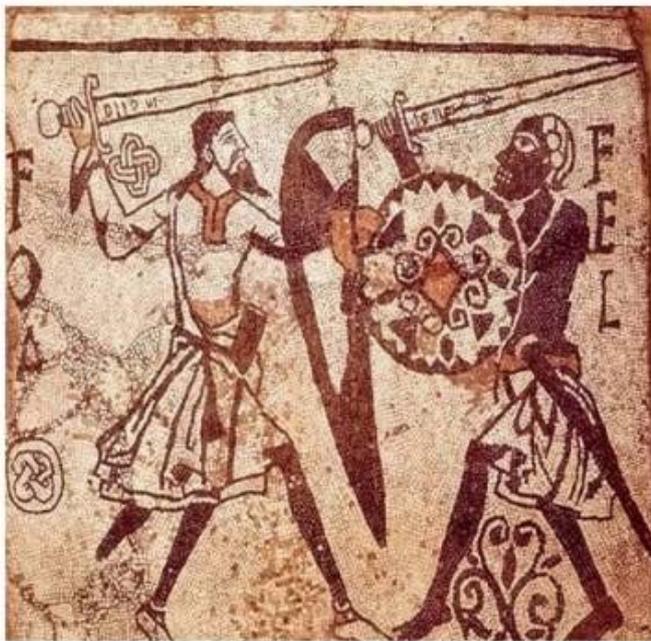


Top:

A Perlen (Buweyhid) delegation is sent to the Seljuc Sultan "Tagrolapex" (Togrul-Beg) to ask for three thousand mercenaries. The cavalry unit behind the delegation is identified as Turkish cavalry. (Skyltzes chronicle in Madrid, miniature 566, fol. 232r).

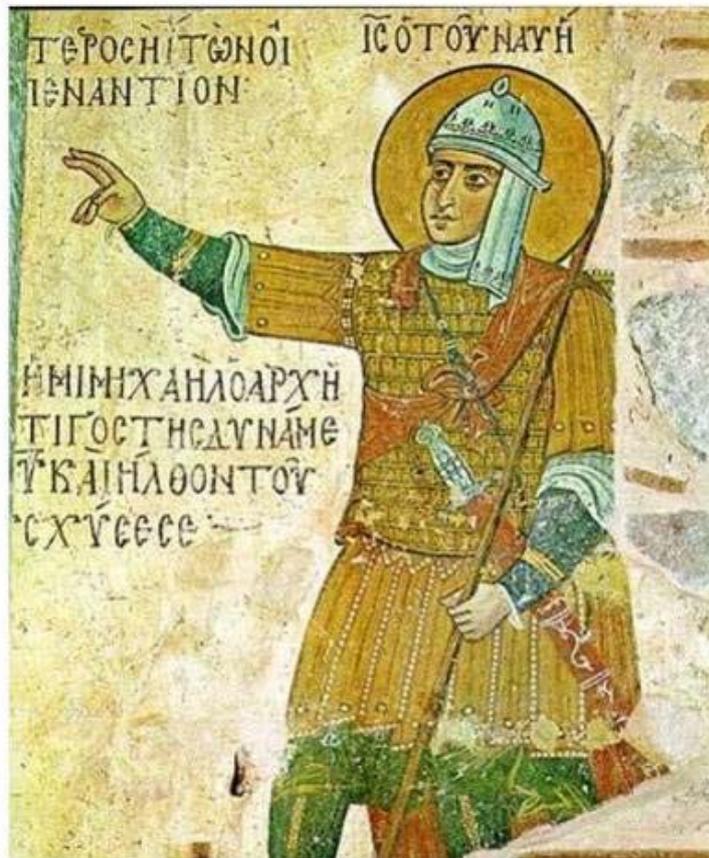
Bottom:

The Seljuce (left) ambush a Perlen army (right). Notice the difference in the body armour between the two armies. The Seljuce are also carrying lances but no bows are visible. (Skyltzes chronicle in Madrid, miniature 567, fol. 232v).



Top:
Muslim cavalry. A panel from *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria* by Alfonso X el Sabio (fol. 112r).

Bottom:
A duel between a Norman and a Muslim. Note the characteristic differences in clothing and equipment. The small, round shield of the Muslim, and the "kite-shaped" shield of the Norman. The former is also not wearing any body armour, while the Norman is lacking a hauberk and a helmet. Twelfth century mosaic from the *Museo Carrillo Leone, Vercelli*.



A twelfth century ecclesiastical painting of Joshua. Although later, this painting most likely depicts earlier – probably eleventh century, military tradition regarding the equipment of a Byzantine infantry soldier: short cotton or silk tunics down to their knees (*καβάδια*), with their sleeves being short and broad probably reaching down to their forearms, supplemented by short-mail coate over their tunics. The offensive equipment included swords girded at the waist (*σπαθιά ζωστικά*) and the 25-30 epithemai (6-7m) spears (*κοντάριον*). Also note the "eastern type" conic helmet. From the monastery of St-Loukas in Balates, Greece.



The Byzantine cavalry pursues the "Agerene". Note that the uniforms of both units are identical, apart from the helmets. (Skylitzez chronicle in Madrid, miniature 129, fol. 54v).



The Byzantines are doing battle with the Bulgarians. Both units are represented in identical military costumes. Note the cavalry archer of the Byzantines on the left. (Skylitzez chronicle in Madrid, miniature 5, fol. 11v).