

***AIDŌS* DID NOT PREVENT HER: AN INTERTEXTUAL APPROACH TO
KOMNENE'S DEPICTIONS OF WOMEN IN POSITIONS OF POWER**

BY

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Cover image: Hesse, Alexandre, *Adoption of Godefroy de Bouillon by Alexis Comnène, 1097*, 1842. Oil on canvas. The Palace of Versailles, North wing, Crusades rooms, first room. Cropped to focus on the western edge of the painting where Empress Irene Doukaina is shown seated on a throne and her daughters peer down at the court scene from behind her.

Abstract

Anna Komnene depicts several women in positions of power in the *Alexiad*, the earliest extant historiographical text written by a woman from the Byzantine period. The intertextual qualities of these depictions of women, however, have not received much attention and indeed the impact of the gender of the author on the text is a topic which skews much of the scholarship. This thesis aims to show that several signposted quotations of earlier source texts reveal an author in the act of contemplating the expectations of gendered behaviour for her narrative subjects, including her own authorial persona.

The chapters in this thesis focus on the depictions of four women and the roles they play in the *Alexiad*: Anna Dalassene, Gaita of Salerno, Emma of Hauteville and Anna Komnene. First, the construction of one or more of these characters is broken down and the evidence in the text concerning the positions of power held by the woman is analysed. Second, an intertextual reading of a passage related to the characterisation of each woman is posed in order to discuss what is similar or different concerning the source text or texts and the target text. The rhetorical goals behind the depictions of the women are also considered, and their actions in relation to the societal expectations of appropriate gendered behaviour for women and men during the Byzantine Empire.

The four case studies demonstrate that Komnene depicted these women using their power in the service of the family unit while showing due deference to their fathers, husbands or adult sons. Furthermore, the “double consciousness” of Komnene, as revealed in these depictions, shows her commitment to the contemplation of the power of women and the ways in which women could utilise their self-control to manipulate expectations of gendered behaviour and thus protect their family units, and therefore the means by which they came to hold power. The outcome of this research contributes to efforts to better understand representations of gender in the literature of the Byzantine empire, deepens the discussions of Komnene’s use of source texts and expands on the insights of earlier scholarship.

Preface Information

I follow Leonora Neville's system and cite the *Alexiad* according to the book, chapter, and paragraph number as it appears in the edition by Reinsch and Kambylis. My research is guided by Peter Frankopan's revision of E. R. A. Sewter's English translation of the text. Where I use my own translations from the *Alexiad*, I will say so. I have spelled names as they appear in the *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*. In quotations and citations, however, I have retained the author's spelling of names and places. As Penelope Buckley has observed, the conventions of Byzantine history and Byzantine studies make it normal to refer to the historian as "Anna." However, referring to an author who is a woman (or any professional who is a woman for that matter) by her first name in modern times is considered an effect of gender bias and associated with a perception of women who are professionals as lower in status in comparison with their peers who are men. Thus, I will refer to Anna Komnene as "Komnene."

Abbreviations

AIAAR	<i>Anonymi in Aristotelis Artem Rhetoricam</i> (ed. Rabe)
Alexiad	Komnene, Anna, <i>The Alexiad</i> (ed. D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis)
Bibliotheca	Pseudo-Apollodorus, <i>Bibliotheca</i> (ed. Richard Wagner)
BT	Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
Epitome Historion	Zonaras, John, <i>Ioannis Zonarae Epitomae Historiarum</i> (ed. T. Büttner-Wobst)
F	Komnene, Anna, <i>The Alexiad of Anna Komnene</i> (tr. E. R. A. Sewter; rev. Peter Frankopan)
GRW	Of Apulia, William, <i>Gesta Roberti Wiscardi</i> (ed. Marguerite Mathieu)
Historia	Choniates, Niketas, <i>Nicetae Choniatae Historia, Pars Prior</i> (ed. J. van Dieten)
Iliad	Homer, <i>Homeri Ilias</i> vol. prius et alterum (ed. Martin L. West)
Lexikon	Photios, <i>Photii Patriarchae Lexicon</i> (ed. C. Theodoridis)
OCD	<i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> (ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth), oxfordreference.com/
ODB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i> (ed. Alexander P. Kazhdan), oxfordreference.com/
ODCW	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of the Classical World</i> (ed. John Roberts), oxfordreference.com/
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i> (eds. John Simpson and Edmund Weiner), oed.com/
Odyssey	Homer, <i>Odyssea</i> (ed. Martin L. West)
Phoinissai	Euripides, <i>Euripidis Fabulae</i> (ed. J. Diggle)
Rhetoric	Aristotle, <i>Aristotelis Ars Rhetorica</i> (ed. W. D. Ross)
R-K	Komnene, Anna, <i>Alexiad</i> in <i>Annae Comnenae Alexias</i> vol. 40.1 (ed. D. R. Reinsch and A. Kambylis)
S	Komnene, Anna, <i>The Alexiad of Anna Comnena</i> (tr. E. R. A. Sewter)
SIARC	Stephanos, <i>In Artem Rhetoricam Commentaria</i> (ed. Rabe)
Suda	<i>Suidae Lexicon</i> (ed. A. Adler)
TLG	<i>Thesaurus Linguae Graecae</i> (The Regents of the University of California), www.tlg.uci.edu/

Chapter 1: Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore the characterisation of women in positions of power in the *Alexiad*, and to examine how an intertextual approach to the individual depictions of these women reveals the authorial persona of Anna Komnene's self-awareness of gendered expectations of behaviour throughout the text. The societal expectations of appropriate behaviour for women and men during the Byzantine Empire will be outlined and discussed, as will the unique status of the *Alexiad* in the context of the Greek tradition of historiography. This thesis will assert that the authorial persona of Anna Komnene suggests women could be capable leaders and competent advisers without compromising the structure of their family units, a challenge to the dominating patriarchal ideology of her time. The focus of this thesis is the representation of Gaita of Salerno, Emma of Hauteville, Anna Dalassene and the authorial persona of Komnene herself. Komnene presents women as agents, actors and victims, and thus the *Alexiad* is a woman-authored work which depicts women doing and feeling, a rare and indispensable quality. The rhetorical goals behind such depictions in the work of an author who makes no secret of her education and class are worthy of exploration in the effort to better understand representations of gender in the literature of the Byzantine empire.

Power is defined as “the ability to act or affect something” and some possible actions for one who has power include “to command” and “to rule.”¹ One result of the societal expectations of appropriate behaviour for Byzantine women was a limited number of opportunities to hold power. As in the Roman Empire of the early common era, a woman who exercised power over a man was “an object of grave suspicion” and they did not hold positions in the church, army or civil administration.² Yet the *Alexiad*, which is in itself a claim to the traditionally masculine power of discourse, contains several literary depictions of women acting, commanding, influencing, speaking and (worst of all) making eye contact.³ Alongside a tendency to depict women acting with self-determination, Anna Komnene often sets up a comparison between her literary subjects and figures from earlier texts. These narrative choices invite the sensitivity of the reader as to how the scenes in the *Alexiad* and its source texts are similar or different and what meanings these intertextual relationships might impart. Though indeterminate, such links can be valuable entry points

¹ *OED* s.v. “power, n.1,” 2020.

² James 2008, 645.

³ Papaioannou 2012, 116.

for understanding the role of gender in the target text, in this case the *Alexiad*.⁴ They may also aid in the tracing of the “double consciousness” of Komnene, a term which describes the quality of narrating masculine content, such as warfare and politics, for the public majority while speaking as a woman from the private sphere, alienated from the male-dominated spaces of her society.⁵ To demonstrate how the scenes of women in power reveal disruption of gender norms, I propose the following strategy: first, a focus on the characterisation of the selected woman across the whole of the *Alexiad* to ascertain her role in the narrative and her relationships with other characters; second, intertextual analysis of particular passages where the authorial persona of Komnene has signposted an earlier text as a source text for her own narrative.

The *Alexiad*

The *Alexiad* consists of fifteen books of historiographical prose in classicizing Greek which form a narrative of the reign of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos, who was situated in Constantinople and ruled from 1081 to 1118 as the *autokrator* of the Roman Empire.⁶ Scholars from the sixteenth century onwards have referred to this empire as “Byzantine” or “Medieval Roman”, and I will use the former of the two terms out of force of habit.⁷ The *Alexiad* was written in the middle of the twelfth century by Anna Komnene and, unlike most other Byzantine histories, it focuses solely on the reign of one emperor.⁸ The text creates a portrait of Alexios as “the greatest of all emperors” and a hero who embodied the best parts of Byzantine rulers past.⁹ The structure of the narrative is not strictly chronological, nor is the coverage of the events even, and these manipulations of the material are widely understood to be in the service of the laudatory nature of the text, a nature crucial to the self-styling of the authorial persona in the text.¹⁰ What separates Anna Komnene from all other authors of history in the Greek tradition is that she is the daughter of her chosen subject.¹¹

⁴ See Masterson 2014, 14-15, for an argument in favour of using intertextuality in investigations of late-ancient (and, therefore, Byzantine) literature.

⁵ Winkler 2002, 41, created this term in his work on Sappho, and Papaioannou 2012, 116, first applied it to Anna Komnene and the *Alexiad*.

⁶ Accessible introductions to the text include Neville 2018, 174-85, and Sewter 2009, ix-xxiv. Garland 1999, 241, defines *autokrator* as the Greek translation for the Latin *imperator*, “emperor”, which from the ninth century designates the senior emperor of the Byzantine Empire.

⁷ Neville 2019b, 2-3.

⁸ Neville 2018, 12.

⁹ Buckley 2014, 285.

¹⁰ Neville 2018, 174. See Frankopan 2001, 61-2, on countering the claim that the *Alexiad* is “simply a panegyric” because Komnene does not always show Alexios in a favourable light.

¹¹ See Neville 2016, 1-5, who describes the biography of Anna Komnene. She was born in Constantinople on December 1st, 1083, a few years into the reign of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos and Empress Irene Doukaina

The relationship between daughter and father and all of its societal trappings is thus a common topic in the text.

The goal of the *Alexiad* is narrow by the standards of Byzantine historiography. Rather than describe many elements of a chosen period of time or chronicle important moments in history from the beginning of humanity, Anna Komnene restricts her text to the life and achievements of Emperor Alexios I Komnenos.¹² The extant text completes the task, and in pursuit of her goal the author describes several women who were close to or came into conflict with the emperor during his reign.¹³ Komnene wrote the *Alexiad* late in her lifetime, at least twenty years after the last events of its narrative, and in the text the author states that research and preparations for writing began when her brother Emperor John II Komnenos ruled between 1118 and 1143, and that the text as it survives was completed during the reign of her nephew Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143-1180).¹⁴ The sources of the *Alexiad* include documents, the accounts of eye witnesses, other histories, and at times Komnene relies on her own personal reminiscences to construct her account.¹⁵ Twelve surviving manuscripts contain parts of the *Alexiad*, which suggests the only extant history

and the first of their many children. See *Alexiad* 6.8.1-3 (R-K 183-5, F 167-8, S 196-7) for the account of the birth of the author in the narrative. Besides the *Alexiad*, Anna Komnene is also survived by the preface to her will, several poems, and the funeral oration which Georgios Tornikios wrote and performed in her honour. For the text of the *Preface to the Will and Testament of the Kaisarissa Lady Anna, as Published by Her*, see Gautier 1972, 105-9, or more recently Papaioannou 2012, 99-121, which includes a complete English translation, commentary, and the original Greek text as edited by Gautier. See Neville 2018, 177 n.16, for a brief consideration of the poems. See Darrouzès 1970, 220-323, for a French translation of the oration by Tornikios with facing Greek.

¹² Anna Komnene states her goal for the text in the *prooimion* (*Alexiad* Pr.1.2, R-K 6, F 3, S 17-18): “I desire now by means of my writings to give an account of my father’s deeds... both as many as he accomplished after having taken the throne and as many as he did while serving other emperors”, “βούλομαι διὰ τῆσδέ μου τῆς γραφῆς τὰς πράξεις ἀφηγήσασθαι τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς... ὅσας τὲ τῶν σκῆπτρων ἐπειλημμένος κατεπράξατο καὶ ὅσας πρὸ τοῦ διαδήματος ἔδρασεν ἑτέροις βασιλεῦσιν ὑπηρετούμενος” (translation adjusted from Sewter 2009). See Afinogenov 1992, 13-33, for a comparison between Byzantine historians and chroniclers.

¹³ In the introduction to Sewter 2009, xvii, Frankopan states that if not for the *Alexiad*, knowledge of events during the reign of Alexios would have been limited. The *Historiarum Epitome* of John Zonaras provides a brief and differing view of Alexios’ rule, and other historical narratives from the period either end at the start of his reign or start at his death in 1118. On page xviii Frankopan also labels two anonymous poems known as the *Mousai* (which are “broadly” contemporaneous with Alexios’ death) as general records of his reign, but their primary function is to give prescriptive advice to John II.

¹⁴ *Alexiad* 14.7.5 (R-K 451-2, F 421, S 460): “Most of the evidence I collected myself, especially in the reign of the third emperor after my father...”, “ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ τὰ πολλὰ τούτων συνελεξάμην, καὶ κράτιστα ἐπὶ τοῦ μετὰ τὸν ἐμὸν πατέρα τρίτου τὰ τῆς βασιλείας σκῆπτρα διέποντος.” Komnene practises the Roman habit of inclusive counting because she is, in her frame of reference, a Roman. See Vilimonović 2018, 15 n. 1, Treadgold 2013, 362, and Browning 1962, 4, for further discussions on the dating of the composition of the *Alexiad*. See Frankopan 2001, 66, for evidence that the *Alexiad* was not quite finished because four lacunae have been identified by the editors of the text.

¹⁵ See, for example, *Alexiad* 14.7.4 (R-K 451, F 421, S 459): “Most of the time, moreover, we were ourselves present, for we accompanied our father and mother”, “τὰ μὲν γὰρ πλείω καὶ ἡμεῖς συνῆμεν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ τῇ μητρὶ συνεπιόμεθα...” See Neville 2016, 75-88, for a discussion of the challenges Komnene faced as a woman attempting to follow traditional historical methodology.

written by a woman from the Byzantine period was also a fairly popular one.¹⁶ A contributing factor to the heavy criticism the text received in the early modern period, and a topic I will explore below, is the sections of the *Alexiad* where the authorial persona of Anna Komnene intrudes upon the narrative of classical history to mourn and lament her deceased kin.¹⁷ What is now recognised as a rhetorical strategy, owing to the research of Leonora Neville, of an author trying to display her capacity to be both a good woman and a good historian was considered evidence of the weakness of the prose and its writer.¹⁸ With the help of a growing interest in gender studies and gendered emotions in Byzantine literature, the *Alexiad* is well nigh rehabilitated.¹⁹

Intertextuality

“Intertextuality”, as defined by Lowell Edmunds, is “the study of a certain kind of relation between texts” or the study of one text quoting another or others.²⁰ This term is useful for exploring the subjectivity of the reader because there is no correct way to read a text and every reader brings with them to the page their own expectations, interests and prior reading experiences.²¹ The indeterminacy of intertextual studies is evident due to the variables of authorial intent, the competence of the reader and the potential for the reader to make meanings which the author of the target text did not intend to create. Such indeterminacy is unavoidable because intertextuality is a feature of semiotic systems and therefore texts are “born” already situated within a textual system or, as Don Fowler described it, “the matrix of possibilities created by those pre-existing texts.”²² The opportunities for intertextual readings and their meanings are therefore endless but this polysemous texture does not

¹⁶ See Reinsch and Kambylis 2001, vol. 40.1, 13-28, for an outline of the manuscript tradition and a helpful chart for understanding which manuscripts are dependent on each other. Reinsch and Kambylis base their text on the three oldest manuscripts of the *Alexiad*: Florentinus Laurentianus 70.2 (mid/late 12th c.), Parisinus Coislilianus 311 (late 13th c.) and Vaticanus Graecus 981 (late 13th c. also). Vilimonović 2018, 67, states that the *Alexiad* survives in fourteen manuscripts but Reinsch and Kambylis list only twelve. Reinsch and Kambylis 2001, vol. 40.1, 30, also provide a list of translations of the *Alexiad*. There are two English versions: Elizabeth A. S. Dawes, 1928, and E. R. A. Sewter, 1969. The latter was revised in 2009 by Peter Frankopan and this text is the source of my English translations of the *Alexiad* unless I specify that they are my own. Frankopan bases his 2009 revised translation of Sewter on Reinsch and Kambylis 2001.

¹⁷ Neville 2018, 175. For a discussion of the phenomenon of the historian in the history, see Macrides 1996, 205-24.

¹⁸ See Neville 2016, 61-74, for a dissection of these passages of lamentation and their rehabilitation.

¹⁹ The 2018 edited volume on emotions and gender in Byzantine culture by Constantinou and Meyer represents, to me, an exciting movement in Byzantine studies.

²⁰ Edmunds 2001, 134. This is perhaps the simplest definition of the term, as one who reads the critical study of intertextuality by Graham Allen will discern that it has a complex history stemming from the work of M. M. Bakhtin, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. For an introduction to these theorists and intertextuality see Allen 2000, 8-60.

²¹ Allen 2000, 7.

²² Fowler 2000, 119.

equate to irrelevance, especially when the author signals the presence of a source text by supplying the name of another author, the title of the text or verbs of reporting. The term is thus a useful tool for the analysis of literature such as the *Alexiad*, written in a style now recognised as creative and daring, which includes the use of classical models and a high level of characterisation.²³ Furthermore, this literary style and its complex structures was a feature of the Komnenian period in Byzantium.²⁴ As Anthony Kaldellis has shown, Komnene and her contemporaries sought to challenge readers to decipher their codes and remain alert to their use of the classical tradition.²⁵

Based on the title alone readers could correctly assume that Anna Komnene sought to make her account of her father epic.²⁶ The *Alexiad* contains many similes, metaphors and vivid descriptive passages, and for the most part Komnene signposts her literary models. No secret is made of the education of the author, and so from the text one can construct an authorial persona who claims to have studied letters, the Greek language, rhetoric, the rules of Aristotle, the dialogues of Plato, the quadrivium of sciences (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music), grammar, logic, schedography and medicine.²⁷ Evidence of this education is demonstrated by the quantity of source texts quoted in the *Alexiad* and the frequency with which they occur.²⁸ The scope of this thesis will include passages of Homeric epic poetry, Attic tragedy, collections of myths and poetic verse from the sixth century BCE. The ways in which I will use intertextuality are delineated in the methodology chapter below.

Behaving Appropriately in the Byzantine Empire

In a summary of the scholarship concerning the role of women in the Byzantine Empire, Liz James outlined the prevailing Byzantine ideology towards women as one that considered them “inferior beings to men, weak, untrustworthy, and ranked with children, the mentally deranged, and slaves” who were spoken for rather than who spoke for themselves.²⁹ Most

²³ Mullett 2006, 11-13.

²⁴ For explorations of the literary culture of the twelfth century in Byzantium, see Cooper 2013, 263-90; Kaldellis 2007, 225-316; Mullett 2006, 1-2; Horrocks 1997, 175-8; Hunger 1969-70, 15-38. Cf. Browning 1975b, 5: “It is an age of uncreative erudition, of sterile good taste.”

²⁵ Kaldellis 2007, 237.

²⁶ Neville 2018, 174.

²⁷ Buckler 1929, 165-78, provides a tidy summary of all the passages where the authorial persona claims to have studied a subject. See *Alexiad Pr.* 1.2 (R-K 5-6, F 3, S 17-18); 3.4.4 (R-K 96-7, F 88, S 112); 15.7.9 (R-K 485, F 455, S 496); 15.11.18 (R-K 501-2, F 470, S 513) for examples. Komnene makes similar claims in her will: see Papaioannou 2012, 104-5.

²⁸ See the Index Locorum in Reinsch and Kambylis 2001, vol. 40.2, 261-71, and Buckler 1929, 187-221.

²⁹ James 2008, 644.

of the information about women in Byzantium comes from written or visual sources created by men, and the ideology of women as inferior to them is based on the teachings of the Church.³⁰ Women (and eunuchs) were assumed to be incapable of occupying positions of power due to the perception that they were unable to regulate their emotions.³¹ The structure of the culture of Byzantium was thus permeated with patriarchal assumptions concerning the “natural” differences between men, women and eunuchs, and so women viewed the cultural construction of their inferiority as a “natural barrier” to the experiences enjoyed by men.³² To behave appropriately in the Byzantine Empire one had to self-regulate their “innate disposition” depending on their gender.³³ Men were perceived to have a natural capacity to control their emotional response when provoked, and they had to exercise their ability to restrain themselves; women were thought to be controlled by their feelings, but they could learn to cultivate self-control through hard work and come to know courage.³⁴ Good behaviour was therefore whatever helped men to uphold the order of society.³⁵

The style of the intrusions of the authorial persona pose urgent questions about its interpretation. Perceptions of good and bad behaviour in Byzantium were closely tied to emotion, and the depiction of emotion in literary texts often has an agenda.³⁶ As Leonora Neville has argued, one does not see real women and men “expressing” their gender in a literary text, but “representations of gendered behaviour” crafted with rhetorical goals in mind.³⁷ This argument is pertinent with regard to Komnene’s self-styled persona in the text and her depictions of other women. Gender theory and gendered virtues will be discussed further under methodology, but for now it is important to introduce the idea that praise and blame of characters in a text is often closely related to the classical models to whom they are compared. Both the performance of emotion of characters in the *Alexiad* and that of the classical models they are linked to provide clues for readers as to how they should judge a character.

³⁰ James 2009, 38; James 2008, 644 ; Galatariotou 1985, 62.

³¹ Constantinou 2019, 287.

³² Galatariotou 1985, 69.

³³ Neville 2019b, 26.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁶ Neville 2019a, 65.

³⁷ Neville 2019a, 65.

East and West

The political context of the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh and twelfth centuries needs some explanation, especially with regard to understanding the depictions of the Italo-Norman women of the *Alexiad*. The year 1071 contained a slough of disappointments and losses for the Byzantine Empire. Not only did the army suffer a heavy defeat against the Turkish forces at Mantzikert in Armenia which resulted in the capture of Emperor Romanus IV, but a few months beforehand the Normans succeeded in their three-year-long siege of Bari and thus ended five centuries of Byzantine presence in southern Italy.³⁸ The leader of these Normans, Robert Guiscard, went on to be a major adversary to Emperor Alexios I Komnenos once he came to power in 1081, despite the fact that his own personal grievances were the result of the actions of Emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates, whom Alexios had deposed in a military coup.³⁹ Though Byzantines and Normans were united by their Christianity, they were divided by an ideological and religious schism. The *Alexiad* contains outright criticism of the papacy, the leader of the church of the Western Roman Empire, and this hatred of western concepts extends to the Normans who are labelled barbarians by Komnene, along with every other non-Greek race.⁴⁰ In her reproach of the Western Roman Empire some scholars have also perceived critiques of Manuel I, the emperor who reigned while Komnene wrote the *Alexiad*, because he liked the Normans and had made alliances with them.⁴¹ Yet throughout most of the reign of Alexios, the relationship between East and West was hostile and the analysis of literary depictions of Italo-Normans in the text must be considered within this frame. The women who feature in this thesis are all connected to Alexios and his role as emperor because his deeds are the focus of the text. The text is thus skewed towards depictions of Byzantine women close to the imperial family or Italo-Norman women who participated in the military campaigns of the period.

³⁸ This historical narrative was constructed from Loud 2000, 210-11. Loud 2000, 1-11, provides an excellent introduction to the Normans and how they rose to power in Italy before advancing on Byzantium, which one can read more about in pages 209-23. See also van Houts 2000, 223-67.

³⁹ This personal grievance was Botaneiates' decision to tear up a marriage contract betrothing Constantine Doukas to a daughter of Robert Guiscard and Gaita of Salerno known as Helena. See *Alexiad* 1.10.2 (R-K 34-5, F 30, S 53) for Komnene's opinion of the proposed match.

⁴⁰ See Frankopan 2001, 59-76, and Buckler 1929, 5, 307-14, 449-55, for a discussion of the anti-West theme in the *Alexiad*. Albu 2011, 500, also offers a helpful framework in which to understand Anna Komnene's prejudice.

⁴¹ Vilionović 2018, 103; Albu 2011, 500; Magdalino 2000, 35-6.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The context in which the *Alexiad* was written and the gender of its author have consistently proved to be a matter of provocation for many academics. Up until recently, much of the scholarship on Anna Komnene and her work has functioned better as a resource for the scholar's opinion of educated women and not as a fair study of a complex piece of literature written by an aristocratic woman just under one thousand years ago. Edward Gibbon used the *Alexiad* as a source for the First Crusade in his 1788 volume of the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* only moments after questioning "the veracity of the historian and the merit of the hero" because of the "elaborate affectation of rhetoric and science [which] betrays, in every page, the vanity of a female author."⁴² As Leonora Neville illustrated in her 2016 book devoted to restoring the reputation of Anna Komnene, the perception of the character of the historian in early modern scholarship sustained serious damage from Gibbon's assessment.⁴³ Georgina Buckler, whose detailed study of Anna Komnene was first published in 1929, opens her book with a curt shot at the inadequacy of scholarship on Byzantine history, attributed (in her opinion) to Gibbon's scorn, especially with regard to "the case of the special subject at hand."⁴⁴ Attitudes towards the *Alexiad* and Byzantine studies in general have since improved.⁴⁵

As Maria Mavroudi has demonstrated, the *Alexiad* is special for its status as the only extant history written by a woman from the Byzantine period.⁴⁶ Buckler's 1929 study has been something of a touchstone for later scholars, and in the past twenty years several edited volumes and monographs on the *Alexiad* have appeared. As mentioned above, Leonora Neville has made several helpful and accessible forays into the text; as an expert on twelfth century historiography and gender in Byzantium, Neville has revealed the highly rhetorical nature of the text and provided the tools for understanding the representation of Anna

⁴² Gibbon 1994, vol. 3, 69.

⁴³ See Neville 2016, 156-8, for further analysis of Gibbon's comments on Komnene and the *Alexiad*. In the chapter on early modern impressions of Komnene (153-174), Neville discusses a sample of histories published between the late 17th and early 20th century in order to show the bias in the scholarship. Though some portraits are more sympathetic than others, the character of Komnene is established by the early scholarship as vain and ambitious and the *Alexiad* is viewed with suspicion by association. Neville then moves on to scholarship from the last 100 years, which I will discuss in more detail.

⁴⁴ Buckler 1929, 3. Just before Buckler went to press, Dr. Elizabeth Dawes produced the first English translation of the *Alexiad* in 1928, fulfilling one of the desires of Buckler for the future of *Alexiad* scholarship.

⁴⁵ In the preface to the *Oxford History of Byzantium* 2002, v, editor Cyril Mango declares that the undue neglect of Byzantium is over, and the "contemptuous abuse that was heaped on Byzantium by the likes of Montesquieu and Edward Gibbon... was generally dismissed well before the end of the nineteenth century in favour of a more positive assessment."

⁴⁶ Mavroudi 2012, 63: between the fourth and fifteenth century CE there are seven recorded women authors.

Komnene's authorial persona in the text.⁴⁷ Neville also has dissected the pervasive assumption that Anna Komnene was an ambitious and vindictive conspirator who sought to overthrow her brother, John II, and then channelled her disappointment at the failure of her plans into the *Alexiad*.⁴⁸

The 2014 study of the text written by Penelope Buckley focused on literary aspects of the *Alexiad*, such as how Alexios was mythologised in the text and the limits of the form of history.⁴⁹ In the introduction to her book, Buckley isolates a key concern for Byzantine scholars: "A fault line in *Alexiad* studies is still a habit of almost automatic motive-reading."⁵⁰ I find it likely that this "fault line" is related to Gibbon and the insidious perception of Komnene as an ambitious woman, which in turn owes to the widely accepted version of events following Alexios' death that Neville challenges in her 2016 book.

The majority of the published scholarship on the *Alexiad* treats this usurpation story as factual, due in part to the fact that Neville's book is fairly recent, and considers much of Komnene's textual behaviour to be politically motivated for this one reason. As such, rough and refined scholars alike have made missteps and indulged in motive-reading and denigration.⁵¹ Whether or not one believes the conclusions of Neville that the events of 1118 have been misunderstood and misrepresented, the dominant narrative of Komnene as arrogant and ambitious has had plenty of airtime. The most recent book dedicated to the *Alexiad*, the 2018 monograph by Larisa Orlov Vilimonović, argued that the political ambitions of Komnene are on display in the text, but this agenda did not make her "power-hungry," just "interested in politics."⁵² In order to provide an example of the importance of

⁴⁷ The first half of Neville 2016 focuses on the authorial persona of Anna Komnene, and the latter half on her portrayal in other texts of the twelfth century. Her work on lamentation in the *Alexiad* first appeared in Neville 2013, 192-218, and Neville 2014, 263-74, followed by a more recent article, Neville 2019a, 65-92, which consists of a study of gendered emotions as performed by the authorial persona. Neville 2019b is an accessible introduction to Byzantine gender.

⁴⁸ Neville 2016, 141-51.

⁴⁹ Buckley 2014, 289.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 26. Buckley quotes Kaldellis 2007, 232, as an example of motive-reading: "Anna Komnene... desperately envied Psellos' learning and reputation." Statements such as these can be found all throughout *Alexiad* scholarship.

⁵¹ Neville 2016, 112. Buckley 2014, 23-32 ('Some Bad Weather'), notes the tendency of modern scholarship to criticise "ad feminam." Browning 1962, 8: "Anna may not have really had much of a head for philosophy." Again, Browning 1992, 204: "Anna was a snob, and she spent far too much energy trying to write thoroughly classicizing Greek." Howard-Johnston 1996, 286: "...Anna had no special aptitude for this genre of writing." Hill 2000, 45: "Anna Komnene was of course a snob." Kaldellis 2007, 239: "Anna – a hugely conceited woman." More in the vein of motive-reading, Treadgold 2013, 364, 378, calls the *Alexiad* a "labour of love" and says that Komnene "would surely have liked to exercise power as the wife of the emperor."

⁵² Vilimonović 2018, 339. Vilimonović has doubts about Neville's 2016 assessment of Komnene's political movements, suggesting rather that it is the *Alexiad* and not the histories of Zonaras and Choniates which provide evidence to support Komnene's political ambition. The thesis statement of Vilimonović 2018, 20, is that the *Alexiad* emerged from the Doukai side of the family and "engendered an alternative political discourse

considering representations of gender in relation to the rhetorical goals of the text, I will briefly outline the sources of this usurpation story.

Bad Girl Komnene

There are two sources commonly used to prove there was an attempted usurpation of John II Komnenos. The first is the *Epitome Historion* of John Zonaras, a chronicle of the creation of the world to 1118 which Zonaras wrote in the middle of the twelfth century.⁵³ As the health of Alexios worsened, Zonaras described a growing rivalry between Empress Irene, whom Alexios had given authority to, and their son John.⁵⁴ Finding subservience to his mother intolerable and her great affection for her eldest daughter and son-in-law worrying, John called on his supporters to renew their oaths that no one else but he would be accepted as emperor after Alexios' death.⁵⁵ The account of Zonaras focuses on the tension between John and Irene, who did seem to favour Komnene and Bryennios, and the author makes no mention of Komnene attempting to usurp her brother.⁵⁶ What the text does seem to show is that there was some family unrest at the death of Alexios, and Empress Irene is framed in a negative light in one of the versions of events that Zonaras reports because she complained to Alexios that John had run off to be acclaimed before the current emperor had died.⁵⁷ Irene, rather than her daughter, seems concerned about who is next in line to rule.

The second example is the only source for the direct involvement of Anna Komnene in a plot to kill her brother. Niketas Choniates' *Historia* was written between 1195 and 1203, and revised after 1204.⁵⁸ Choniates begins his narrative with a book on the reign of John II which includes the tension before the death of Alexios. The emperor favoured his son while the empress favoured her daughter.⁵⁹ Irene attempted to persuade her husband to alter the course of succession and he scolded her.⁶⁰ John is acclaimed emperor by his supporters while Alexios is on his deathbed, and Irene, astonished, encouraged Bryennios to seize the

in which the Doukai were the rightful holders of the imperial legacy." Komnene is the rightful heir to the throne in that alternative political discourse, but I find that Vilimonović too fails to consider the rhetorical purpose of representations of gender in the text.

⁵³ *ODB* (s.v. "Zonaras, John," 1991). See Macrides 2000, 73, and Afinogenov 1992, 13-33, for more on Zonaras and his depiction of the reign of Alexios.

⁵⁴ *Epitome Historion* 748.

⁵⁵ *Epitome Historion* 747-8.

⁵⁶ Neville 2016, 96.

⁵⁷ *Epitome Historion* 761-2; Neville 2016, 94.

⁵⁸ *ODB* (s.v. "Choniates, Niketas," 1991). See Simpson 2013, 80-102, for a breakdown of the composition of the *Historia*.

⁵⁹ *Historia* 5.

⁶⁰ *Historia* 5-6.

throne.⁶¹ Her plan failed, and Choniates then described a plot against John in the following year, planned by Anna Komnene and their relatives, wherein Bryennios failed to murder John.⁶² No conspirators were harmed, and any confiscations of property were quickly reversed, and Choniates had this to say about the disgust of Komnene concerning the failure of her husband to carry out the plan:

It is said... that she was blaming nature most of all, placing it under a grave indictment on the grounds that it had spread and hollowed out her socket while it stretched out and rounded Bryennios' member.

λέγεται... καὶ τῇ φύσει τὰ πολλὰ ἐπιμέμφεσθαι, ὑπ' αἰτίαν τιθεῖσαν οὐχὶ μικρὰν ὡς αὐτῇ μὲν διασχοῦσαν τὸ ἄρθρον καὶ ἐγκοιλάνασαν, τῷ δὲ Βρυεννίῳ τὸ μόνιον ἀποτείνασαν καὶ σφαιρώσασαν.⁶³

Neville makes a persuasive argument that the characterisation of Anna Komnene, including her desire to be a man, in the *Historia* of Choniates is intended to be “deeply derogatory.”⁶⁴ The Komnenian women are represented as ambitious, perverse and unnatural in order to serve the rhetorical purpose of the passage on the reign of Alexios: Choniates sought to elucidate the moral corruption in the imperial families of the twelfth century because that was the theme of his text.⁶⁵ The choice to show women trying to control men and wishing they could be them was one such method of communicating to a Byzantine readership that something was wrong with these people. Yet even a close reading of the *Historia* reveals that although Choniates names Anna Komnene as the “chief instigator” of the plot to kill John, the assassination attempt is described as a hypothetical scenario in which Bryennios, not Komnene, cannot strike John down as he sleeps.⁶⁶ So, as I find the argument made by Neville convincing, and as this thesis is concerned with the literary representation of characters rather than the reconstruction of their biographies from highly rhetorical texts, the manipulation of the *Alexiad* for the purpose of alienating its author can rest here.

⁶¹ *Historia* 6-7.

⁶² *Historia* 10.

⁶³ *Historia* 10. I use van Dielen 1975 as my text. Translation provided by Mark Masterson *per litteras* in 2020.

⁶⁴ Neville 2016, 108.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶⁶ *Historia* 8; 10.

Authorship: You Cannot Spell Komnene Without... Men?

In 1996 James Howard-Johnston had an essay published which admitted that the *Alexiad* possessed certain strengths, but only because another author assisted Anna Komnene in its creation. Howard-Johnston seems to be unaccompanied in the opinion that the history was not authored by Komnene alone, but rather an “ill-assorted literary partnership” consisting of the historian and her husband Nikephoros Bryennios.⁶⁷ Howard-Johnston argued that the compelling parts of the *Alexiad* were written by Bryennios, while Komnene was responsible for making the rest of the narrative dull.⁶⁸ Komnene is attributed with larding the text with “learned allusions [and] classical tags” and a literary temperament “not attuned” to the themes of the history, along with the removal of vitality from anecdotes which were originally written by Bryennios.⁶⁹ The main argument, however, for Bryennios as the author of the *Alexiad* seems to be disbelief that Anna Komnene could write at depth on military matters.⁷⁰ A volume of essays titled *Anna Komnene and Her Times*, published in 2000 and edited by Thalia Gouma-Peterson, featured several responses to Howard-Johnston’s goad. Ruth Macrides, to single out one example from the book, dismissed the idea that the high volume of martial content in the text but lack of military experience of Komnene ought to make the reader doubt her authorship because “all male writers except for Psellos” in the Byzantine historiographical tradition depended on reports for their descriptions of military campaigns.⁷¹ Howard-Johnston also argued Komnene depended on a “dossier” of drafts left to her by Bryennios.⁷² In the Gouma-Peterson volume, Diether R. Reinsch was outright in calling this “dossier” a “figment of [Howard-Johnston’s] imagination.”⁷³

Historian and Woman

Scholars disagree as to whether the gender of the author matters for attempts to understand the *Alexiad*. On the one hand, the opinion of Howard-Johnston could be considered a helpful

⁶⁷ Howard-Johnston 1996, 300. According to the *ODB*, Nikephoros Bryennios the Younger (ca. 1064-1137), was a historian and a general named after his father or grandfather who led a revolt against Emperor Michael VII in 1077 (s.v. “Bryennios, Nikephoros the Younger,” 1991). Bryennios the Younger married Komnene around 1097 and served under Emperor Alexios. Bryennios was also an intellectual and wrote a history known as the *Hyle Historias* which was written after 1118 and described events between 1070-9.

⁶⁸ Howard-Johnston 1996, 300.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 284-5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁷¹ Macrides 2000, 66.

⁷² Howard-Johnston 1996, 289. Howard-Johnston was complimentary of Gouma-Peterson’s edited volume in a 2002 review, but his closing remark seemed like a Parthian shot (945): “There is much of interest in this excellent short volume, which will, it is to be hoped, soon be complemented by one devoted to the systematic historical evaluation of the *Alexiad*.”

⁷³ Reinsch 2000, 101, on display in his role as Komnene’s “editor and champion,” so spake Buckley 2014, 3.

exemplar of how to marginalise the writing of a woman. Dion Smythe drew the connection between Howard-Johnston's denial of the agency of Anna Komnene ("her husband wrote the text, not her") and the work of Joanna Russ, who set out the various ways women's writing is made into the chattering "of outsiders on the margins of human (male) society".⁷⁴ Smythe argued that scholars "do not ask the right questions of a text written by a woman," and then moved on to state that he could find no difference in the style of writing which Komnene used and that of her contemporaries.⁷⁵ Though there are differences between the self-stylings of the historians who intrude into their own histories, the literary style of the historical texts of the eleventh and twelfth century in Byzantium, Smythe argued, is similar.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Stratis Papaioannou singled out the work of Michael Psellos and Anna Komnene (who drew inspiration from Psellos quite frequently) for the foregrounding of "gynocentric writing" in their histories, a descriptive term for the tendency to promote female characters and female speech, and the endorsement of aesthetics focused on sensuality and emotions.⁷⁷ Barbara Hill has written several times on the application of the term "feminist" to Anna Komnene, a claim I find unconvincing due to the anachronistic quality of the term and the naturalisation of gendered behaviour in Byzantine society.⁷⁸ All of this scholarship proves helpful in some way, shape or form for approaching the text.

The challenges of approaching the *Alexiad* illuminated by this review of scholarship are therefore the avoidance of the amalgamation of the historical author and the authorial persona, the eschewal of overreading of authorial intrusions and the (productive) indecision as to whether the gender of the author has resulted in narratives pertaining to parts of society not illustrated prior. There is no scholarship thus far which has used intertextuality as a tool for analysis. Studies have listed the texts referred to by Anna Komnene, but they are little more than lists. The scope of this thesis is limited to classical models of reference, and so biblical examples are left waiting for their champion, as are borrowings from Psellos. *Alexiad* scholarship seems to be making a comeback and there are plenty of theory-based approaches, in addition to the intertextuality-based one to be pursued here, that could still be made.

⁷⁴ Smythe 1997, 155, quoting Russ 1983 (a book I was unable to access due to the constraints of the nationwide lockdown).

⁷⁵ Smythe 1997, 155, 156.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁷⁷ Papaioannou 2012, 17. Psellos too was a highly educated writer and a great user of rhetoric.

⁷⁸ See Hill 2000, 45-62, and Hill 1999, 191. Cf. Galatariotou 1985, 69.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Gender

A theoretical framework for gender is a necessary starting point before analysing depictions of women in the *Alexiad* and evaluating the extent to which they conform to or contradict the image of the traditional idealised woman in Byzantium can begin. Following Liz James, I define gender as a tool for research which refers to the differences between men and women in terms of the differences created by their society rather than the biological difference of sex.⁷⁹ The cultural context into which a person is born defines their sex in particular ways and denotes particular attributes, attitudes and characteristics as innate or natural to that sex. The “natural” qualities of the sexes are then socially recognised as, in the case of Byzantium, “masculine” and “feminine.” Gender denotes the cultural definition of sex and so by paying attention to the role of gender one can better understand power, agency, social groupings and the forces at work in a community and, consequently, its literature.⁸⁰ Men and male behaviour was the norm in Byzantine society, an ideology based on the teachings of the Orthodox Christian Church.⁸¹ Thus, as the product of the dominant social elite, gender and its stereotypes are shaped by men to fit their notions of the inferior status of women.⁸²

In order to discuss the ideal behaviour of men and women in Byzantium, knowledge of a vocabulary quite similar to that of gender studies in antiquity is needed. Gender ideals in Byzantine society, as depicted in the mostly man-made products of its culture, were heavily influenced by Christian sexual morality. To summarise several works on the cultural construction of gender in the Byzantine Empire, men showed their manliness or *andreia* by having self-control, while appropriate feminine behaviour was considered to be that which a woman used to discipline herself in order to assist men in the maintenance of their self-control and therefore their masculine authority.⁸³ Women were thought to be innately more

⁷⁹ For this definition of “gender” and the following definitions of “masculine” and “feminine,” see James 2009, 36. For further influential discussions of gender in Byzantine society see the rest of James 2009, 31-50; Peltomaa 2005, 23-44; Smythe 1997, 149-67; Barber 1997, 185-99; Oakley 1991, 22; Laiou 1981, 233-60; Garland 1988, 361-93; Galatariotou 1985, 55-94; and Herrin 1983, 167-90. Smythe 2005, 157-65, and James 1997, xi-xxiv, provide a history of gender studies within Byzantine scholarship. Persons can also be born intersex, a fact rarely addressed in work on gender studies in Byzantium. Ringrose 2003, 5, observed that children born with ambiguous sexual organs were in some instances raised as “natural eunuchs.” Byzantine society also recognised the ability of eunuchs to be categorized as either male or female depending on the gendered qualities they “perform.” See Ringrose 2003, 2-8, and 16 for further discussion.

⁸⁰ Galatariotou 1985, 56.

⁸¹ James 2008, 644. The Church Fathers describe women as inferior and weak due to their responsibility for the fall, by way of Eve, but also spiritually equal to men due to the actions of the Virgin Mary.

⁸² Smythe 1997, 149.

⁸³ This model of Byzantine gender is set out in Neville 2019a, 66, as informed by several works: Neville 2010, 72-82; Papaioannou 2013, 215-31; McGrath 2012, 85-98; James 2009, 31-50; Brubaker 2004, 83-101; Kuefler

susceptible to emotion and unable to control the effects of *pathos*, “passivity,” unless they made a conscious effort to practice self-discipline.⁸⁴ Men, on the other hand, had the basic characteristic of activity, and any man who did not practice his ability to control himself could be considered effeminate.⁸⁵ In a similar manner to the Graeco-Roman world of antiquity, the honour of the Byzantine man was vulnerable through the women he controlled in his household: the sexual misconduct of a woman under the authority of a man was a serious and punishable offence.⁸⁶ Marriage and the procreation of children were considered the primary function of women in Byzantine society, and so the acceptable gender roles available were within the context of the family and the convent.⁸⁷ Deference to male authority and, by proxy, observance of the stereotypes it created were central to the image of the traditional ideal Byzantine woman.

The masculine preoccupations of *timē* (honour) and *atimia* (dishonour) are closely related to the idiom of shame, which is expressed as *aischynē* (an act which brings dishonour to its doer or the emotional experience of moral failure) and *aidōs* (an individual’s sense of shame, in the sense of proper respect for others and the embarrassment that follows bad behaviour).⁸⁸ *Sōphrosynē* and *phronesis* were important virtues related to self-control and, for women, the possession of sexual respectability.⁸⁹ A woman who wanted to be perceived

2001, 2-6; Barber 1997, 185-99; Galatariotou 1985, 55-94. As mentioned above, very few texts written by women survive from the Byzantine period and as Galatariotou 1985, 69, explains, the misogyny present in sources written by women is the expression of the “reality” produced by the patriarchal structure of Byzantine society and the ensuing interiorization of male expectations.

⁸⁴ Neville 2019a, 66. See Cairns 1993, 393-7, for a discussion of *pathos* in Aristotelian sources. See Papaioannou 2013, 213-4, on how *pathos* came to be regarded as a positive masculine virtue in the sense of patience and endurance of suffering for the sake of a higher moral cause in the works of Psellos.

⁸⁵ Neville 2019b, 26-7.

⁸⁶ James 2008, 645: “any girl who lost her virginity to a man other than her betrothed after her betrothal could be repudiated by her fiancé.”

⁸⁷ What documents written by women that do survive seem to show, as explored in Laiou 1985, 65, is that they were aware of their importance to their family and they identify themselves through their parents and husbands. Komnene does this in both the *Alexiad* (*Pr.*1.2, R-K 3, F 3, S 17) and the preface to her will (Gautier 1972, 106, lines 21-4). On acceptable gender roles, see Galatariotou 1985, 78; Laiou 1981, 233-60, and 1985, 59-102. Laiou 1985, 101, observes that life in the convent did not necessarily mean negation of family ties. A woman could enter a nunnery with a daughter if the girl became a nun at the age of consent.

⁸⁸ Harper 2013, 5-6, discusses the similarities and differences between the Greek and Roman vocabulary for shame and sin and how these terms are configured within the framework of Christian ideology. Harper’s argument is that while Christianity did not change the linguistics of sexual morality, it did change the logic. Constantinou 2019, 287, notes that in the handbooks made for male rulers, the future emperor would be encouraged to feel *aidōs* when faced with his mistakes. See Cairns 1993, 1-47, 120-26, and 185-8 for discussions on *aidōs* in Ancient Greek literature, where a woman receives it for her observance of her proper social role and uses it to remain within the guidelines set down by her society. Cairns stresses that it is an emotion, inhibitory in the sense that to feel *aidōs* is to picture oneself losing honour, and to show *aidōs* is to recognise the honour of another.

⁸⁹ Harper 2013, 5, 7; Neville 2019b, 34. See Hill 1996, 14, on *sōphrosynē* being the most admired virtue for men and women in Byzantium.

as good had to display restraint, avoid moving her body and not make eye contact.⁹⁰ The speech of women was considered especially dangerous for its ability to provoke *pathos*, and so a woman who wanted to do her best to uphold the order of the Byzantine world did not speak, swing her limbs or have a hair out of place.⁹¹

Ideologies, however, do not necessary translate into realities. Despite the emphasis in male-authored sources on the virtues of silence and modesty for women, the real housewives of Byzantium had to speak sometimes, and at critical moments, like the onset of grief, the expression of intense emotion was a necessity.⁹² The performance of gender, as defined by patriarchal Byzantine ideology, required the performance of emotionality to succeed, as both masculinity and femininity are achieved in accordance with social norms.⁹³ Men were encouraged to be impassive in order to control their emotions and be competent leaders for their families.⁹⁴ Women were urged to improve their performance in the roles of mothers, wives, widows and daughters by practicing affection, happiness, and compassion.⁹⁵

These affective expressions are behind Leonora Neville's rehabilitation of the *Alexiad* as argued in her 2016 book, as mentioned above, wherein Neville connects criticism of the anomalous woman-authored history to the failure of later readers to recognise that Anna Komnene's presentation as a mourning widow and daughter was part of her strategy to craft an authorial persona who was both a good woman and a good historian.⁹⁶ As argued above, the failed coup of Komnene can be abandoned as a tool for interpreting the *Alexiad*.⁹⁷ With it, too, can go the idea of researching the *Alexiad* to uncover and describe the reality of eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium for practical purposes, because the text is

⁹⁰ Neville 2019b, 38.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹² On the ideal Byzantine woman practicing silence, see McGrath 2012, 91; Papaioannou 2012, 114; Hill 1999, 13; Garland 1988, 378.

⁹³ Constantinou 2019, 286. See also Butler 2010 (first published in 1990), 34, on gender as a "doing" performatively produced and compelled by "the regulatory practices of gender coherence," and James 2009, 37, on Butler.

⁹⁴ Constantinou 2019, 287. Women were also told to avoid aggression and anger because these emotions would put their submissiveness at risk.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ See Neville 2016, "Conclusion," 175-8. Scholars have argued for and against the visibility of the gender of the author in the text and, as mentioned above, some have even questioned Komnene's authorship. Gouma-Peterson 2000, 110, argues that the text contains evidence that Komnene was "profoundly conscious" of her gender. In the same volume, Reinsch 2000, 96, states that the gender of the writer is always unmistakable, not only in the social roles she fulfils as wife, daughter and fiancée but also in the grammar of the text. Cf. Frankopan 2001, 68, who claims that the question of gender is largely hidden in the text, and only from the emotional outpouring of Komnene is the reader made aware that the *Alexiad* was written by a woman.

⁹⁷ Neville 2014, 274.

representational, and the people described in it are not “real” but characters crafted “with a view to the role those performances played in achieving [an author’s] rhetorical goals.”⁹⁸

The status of the author of the *Alexiad* also needs to be kept in the foreground. Anna Komnene was an aristocratic princess narrating the deeds of an emperor, and the scope of her narrative does not often extend to the levels of social hierarchy below her own.⁹⁹ The primary function of women in Byzantine society, as stated by Angeliki E. Laiou, was “the reproduction of its human resources.”¹⁰⁰ The place where women could command and rule was the private household.¹⁰¹ The emperor too usually had a private household, albeit housed in a palace, and so throughout most of the reigns of the emperors of Byzantium an empress also ruled, usually with the designated title of *augousta* (‘empress’), *basilis(sa)* (‘queen’) or *despoina* (‘mistress’) but with no defined constitutional importance.¹⁰² The only other title that a woman could hold was *protovestiaría*, which belonged to the first of the servants of the empress.¹⁰³ A unisex term which Anna Komnene laid claim to was that of “Porphyrogénnētos” (“πορφυρογέννητος”), which means “purple-born,” i.e. born in the Porphyra, with the implication being that the user of the epithet was born when their parents were the rulers of Byzantium though they may not have literally been born in the room itself.¹⁰⁴ The Porphyra was a room in the Great Palace of Constantinople, so-named because it was lined with purple porphyry stone. The term is therefore another way to signal imperial status and an aristocratic upbringing.

⁹⁸ Neville 2019a, 65. See also James 2009, 33, on the nature of history as representational, offering “partial and motivated accounts predicated upon a number of other partial and motivated images and accounts which themselves have a complex relationship to the underlying events that the historical record represents.” The textual sources which provide accounts of living as a man or a woman in Byzantium are, with very few exceptions, written by men. See Mavroudi 2012, 53-84, on the literary output of women from the period.

⁹⁹ Herrin 1983, 168, notes the dearth of sources which can inform the modern scholar about life in rural Byzantium. Cf. Garland 1988, 363, who argues that the ideology expressed through portraits of imperial women and descriptions of their lifestyle is “representative of their society as a whole.”

¹⁰⁰ Laiou 1981, 233-4.

¹⁰¹ James 2008, 645.

¹⁰² Garland 1999, 241-5, provides a useful glossary of terms, titles and places relevant to the life of a Byzantine empress. ‘*Augousta*’ seems to be an honorary title, while the Classical Greek word for ‘queen’, ‘*basilis/basilissa*’, was an official title which appears on coins from the eighth century onwards. ‘*Despoina*’ or ‘*despotis*’ also seems to be an official title which originates from the eighth century.

¹⁰³ *ODB* s.v. “Protovestiaros,” 1991. The title usually belonged to the wife of whomever was designated *protovestiaros*, ‘keeper of the imperial wardrobe’. At first this role was filled by a palace eunuch, and then from the eleventh century the requirement lifted, and many aristocrats and dignitaries were granted the title.

¹⁰⁴ *Alexiad* Pr.1.2 (R-K 6, F 3, S 17-18); *ODB* s.v. “Porphyrogennetos,” 1991. See also Connor 2004, 48, on the grand celebrations which accompanied the birth of a child in the Porphyra.

Intertextuality

This thesis aims to be a persuasive case for the intertextuality of the *Alexiad* as a valuable resource for scholarship, particularly with regard to the self-fashioning of the authorial persona and the representation of women in the narrative. My understanding of intertextuality is that it is a helpful tool for proposing answers to the question of what meanings are made by readers and listeners when they are engaging with a text they perceive as linked to a prior text.¹⁰⁵ I use some of the terminology argued for by Lowell Edmunds, who avoids the term “allusion” and states that the text in which the “quotation” occurs is called the “target text” and the text which the quotation comes from is called the “source text.”¹⁰⁶ I do, however, use the term “allusion” for descriptive purposes and the concept, as in the definition favoured by Stephen Hinds, of allusion as “the teasing play... between revelation and concealment.”¹⁰⁷ There is a spectrum of intertextual activity in the *Alexiad*. Near one end, quotations of almost word for word repetition are attributed to the author of their source text, and near the other allusions reside in semantic clusters.¹⁰⁸

In the case of the *Alexiad*, it is assumed that its contemporary Byzantine audience was educated, like Anna Komnene herself, and engaged.¹⁰⁹ The eleventh and twelfth centuries are now regarded as a period of experimentation and hybridism for Byzantine literature, in which Komnenian authors challenged their audiences to “decode” the complicated structures in their works.¹¹⁰ Classical subjects occur in all levels of schooling, and “the imitation of antiquity” was considered an essential feature of elite Byzantine literature, partly due to the fact that the Eastern Roman Empire did not conceive of a break in its cultural development between itself and the Greeks and Romans of antiquity.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ I have engaged with the following works in coming to my understanding of intertextuality: Masterson 2014, 14-19; Masterson 2010, 79-110; Mastrangelo 2008; Knight 2005; Edmunds 2001; Allen 2000; Fowler 2000, 115-37; Hinds 1998; and Conte 1986, 23-95.

¹⁰⁶ Edmunds 2001, 137.

¹⁰⁷ Hinds 1998, 23. See also Fowler 2000, 118: “...intertextuality... is public, not private, and whether we count a particular resemblance between two texts as sufficiently marked to count as an allusion is determined by the public competence of readers, not the private thoughts of writers.” The intertextuality of source texts which are not in fact “texts” but rather “systems” like myth and social practice will be discussed at a later stage.

¹⁰⁸ Knight 2005, 364, makes this helpful point about the poles of intertextual allusion. See also Conte 1986, 53.

¹⁰⁹ For the education of Komnene’s time, more prevalent amongst the wealthier families of her society, see Markopoulos 2008, 785-91; Buckler 1929, 178-87. Laiou 1981, 257 noted that interest in education for girls seems to be greater from the eleventh century, so the Byzantine readership of the *Alexiad* most likely did not consist entirely of men. See also Mavroudi 2012, 53-84; Reinsch 2000, 83-106. For the education of Komnene, see “Introduction: Intertextuality” above. Horrocks 1997, 176-8, considered the language of the *Alexiad* “high-style Greek” appropriate for the learned Atticist. See also Ljubarskij 1996, 129.

¹¹⁰ Cooper 2013, 263-90; Kaldellis 2007, 237; Mullet 2006, 1-2; Magdalino 2000, 15.

¹¹¹ Kaldellis 2007, 237; Hunger 1969-70, 21.

Assuming a high level of education in the aristocratic circles of Komnenian Constantinople and counting on the probability of an engaged readership, the intertextuality between the *Alexiad* and earlier texts should be regarded as “eminently interpretable.”¹¹² Any claim that Anna Komnene was aware of the ways she met or surprised readerly expectations in her use of her literary tradition should be entertained and is valuable.

Double Consciousness

In an article first published in 1990, J. J. Winkler used the term “double consciousness” to describe one’s awareness of two systems of understanding.¹¹³ As read by Winkler, the archaic lyrics of Sappho express a double consciousness because they describe both her private woman-centred world and the public male-prominent world. To participate in the “public arena” of Lesbos’ male-prominent society, Sappho, as the linguistic minority, had to be “bilingual.”¹¹⁴ This too was true for Anna Komnene. Penelope Buckley briefly mentioned double consciousness in her 2014 study of artistic strategy in response to an article from 2012 by Stratis Papaioannou on Anna Komnene’s will, but Buckley did not seem to see the usefulness of the term.¹¹⁵ To Papaioannou, the preface to the will contains self-representational statements which seem to be the first takes on key themes further elucidated in her later work, the *Alexiad*. The portrait Komnene created of herself was multi-layered: she was a Christian and an aspiring monastic, a member of the imperial family, a loving and beloved daughter of emperor parents, devoted to her mother, loyal to her husband and children, in possession of “innate modesty” and competent in knowledge and discursive performance.¹¹⁶ Komnene styled herself as a woman writer and claimed access to discourse, a form of masculine power in Byzantium. In doing so Papaioannou argued that she displayed the “double consciousness” of a woman writing in an androcentric world speaking both masculine and feminine discourse.¹¹⁷ The application of J. J. Winkler’s brand of “double consciousness” to Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad* is now the auxiliary goal of this thesis.

¹¹² Masterson 2014, 14.

¹¹³ Winkler 2002, 40.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹¹⁵ Buckley 2014, 35-6. Buckley lets the idea of “double consciousness” float into view for a moment in her introduction, before stating that she is more interested in “that integration of powers within or behind” gender roles in Byzantium. Buckley states she sees the value in a gendered analysis but chooses not to engage with the *Alexiad* in terms of gender, “partly to avoid a specialized vocabulary,” but also because she does not want “to attach two-terminal labels to that symbiosis [of narrator and subject].”

¹¹⁶ Papaioannou 2012, 108-16.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

Following Winkler, my analysis of the *Alexiad* begins with the fact that there was a common understanding in the time of Anna Komnene that proper women were expected to be publicly submissive to male definitions – which is to say men as the controllers of public discourse and much of society defined what constituted the behaviour of a “proper woman.” However, there are fragments of Sappho’s lyric poetry, and fifteen books of historiographical prose in Komnene’s *Alexiad*. The simple fact that the source is prose and not poetry alters the approach but not the aim. An analysis of the *Alexiad* will reveal the “traces” of Komnene’s consciousness, just as Winkler sought to recover Sappho’s from her lyrics. The focus here too is reading what is there, what spaces the women in the text inhabit or are excluded from, and the consciousness of Komnene concerning this ideology. The relationship between women, men and power in Byzantine society is of great interest, but decisive conclusions on norms of behaviour, attitudes to the public and allusions to the private reality of Anna Komnene (and, specifically, the women she was close to) are to be avoided.¹¹⁸ Just like Winkler before me, I aim to add readings rather than replace them. This thesis begins with an interest in the construction of the authorial persona and the strategies employed by the author to display appropriate femininity while participating in a masculinizing tradition.

¹¹⁸ Mavroudi 2012 is one example of scholarship which warns against attempting to construct a continuous narrative of the social condition of women in Byzantium, including their access to education and literacy, from the scattered evidence available without reflection on the causes of preservation.

Chapter 4: Anna Dalassene

The following discussion will consider the literary representation of Anna Dalassene in the *Alexiad* and its intertextual relationship with one potential source text. This chapter begins with a study of the roles which Dalassene enacts in the narrative and the virtues attributed to her. As noted by Penelope Buckley, the image of Anna Dalassene changes as the role of Alexios does.¹¹⁹ Dalassene is first depicted as a caring mother. Then, during the narrative of the coup she is active, works with the interest of her sons in mind and uses a state of *pathos* to protect her family. Once Alexios is no longer a rebel but the emperor her characterisation pivots to that of a monastically-minded woman who is only kept from devoting her life to God by her love for her son, God's vice-regent on earth, and her selfless desire to help him. Buckley also argued that Anna Dalassene was not "mythologised" in the text, and that her depiction is free of metaphors and classical allusions. The last part of the chapter challenges Buckley's statement with an analysis of a signposted reference to Euripides' *Phoinissai* which links Dalassene to the rational but ineffectual Jocasta. As this chapter will show, familial unity is of great significance in the text. The rhetorical purpose of Anna Dalassene's performance of the loving mother who unintentionally becomes head of the state could suggest that a virtuous woman with a commendable amount of self-control placed firmly within the patriarchal structure of the family unit, and therefore not dangerous in the eyes of Byzantine society, can be deserving of a position of immense power.

Book One: Mother

The first appearance of Anna Dalassene in the *Alexiad* bears a slight resemblance to the powerful playmaker Byzantine histories remember her as. The core principle, however, behind the early characterisation of Dalassene and her active presence later in the narrative is the same. The primary role in the narrative of Anna Dalassene is that of loving mother, and in the first chapter of the first book of the *Alexiad* she is depicted as the subject of *pathos* due to the loss of one son and her concern for another. The recent death of her eldest son Manuel is a heavy grief which seizes Anna Dalassene ("πάθους καταλαβόντος τὴν μητέρα βαρυτάτου"), and the current emperor Romanos IV Diogenes sends the young Alexios to be with her "in order that she might not be unsupported" ("ἵνα μὴ ἀπαραμύθητος εἴη ἐκεῖνη").¹²⁰ This initial depiction of the relationship between mother and son is in keeping with traditional naturalised ideas about Byzantine gender. An implication of Dalassene

¹¹⁹ Buckley 2014, 79.

¹²⁰ *Alexiad* 1.1.1 (R-K 11, F 9, S 31).

experiencing *pathos*, as women were perceived as naturally inclined to do, is that she required male authority to assist her in governing her emotions, and as a widow the assistance of her adult male child would suffice in returning her to the state of appropriate demure femininity.¹²¹ Thus, the characterisation of Anna Dalassene begins with the traditional image of a mother who cares for her children and is deferential to the authority of her son.

The concern that Anna Dalassene holds for her son and his spiritual wellbeing, and the implication that she is so pious as to worry about the religious needs of others, is revealed in Book One when the rebel Basilakios storms his tent while he is on campaign, and finds only the monk whom Dalassene appointed to be Alexios' tent-companion. In the Byzantine period, piety and spiritual wellbeing were associated with high intrapersonal moral standards and commitment to upholding male authority because men were the leaders of the church.¹²² Dalassene “had taken pains that through all of his acts of service [Alexios] had as tentmate a monk of the highest honour” (“διὰ σπουδῆς ἐπεποίητο... ἐν ἀπάσαις ταῖς αὐτοῦ ἐκστρατείαις ὁμόσκηνον ἔχειν τῶν τιμιωτέρων τινὰ μοναχόν”) and he, “being a friendly son, yielded to the wills of his mother... until he was married to his wife (“ὁ εὖνους οὗτος υἱὸς ὑπεῖκε τῷ μητρικῷ θελήματι... μέχρις ἂν γυναικὶ συνηρμόσθη”).¹²³ One result of this arrangement is that both Alexios and Anna Dalassene appear thoroughly devout, and concomitantly Alexios respects the authority of his mother.¹²⁴ With the provision of a monk for a tent-companion, the author suggests that both mother and son are conscious of orthodoxy and the well-being of the Church.¹²⁵ The reader thus receives a glimpse of the piety which underscores the portrait of Anna Dalassene in Book Three of the *Alexiad* when she acts as regent to Emperor Alexios. These two slices of Book One thereby function as previews of what is to come for the character of Anna Dalassene, and though the reports of her actions increase in frequency, her chief concerns do not change.

¹²¹ Neville 2019b, 26; 33. Garland 1999, 187-8, provides a brief bio of Anna Dalassene: she was born ca. 1030 and married John Komnenos, brother to Emperor Isaac I Komnenos, in 1044. He died in 1067 and Dalassene, having been branded a rebel for some treasonous correspondence, was exiled along with her eight children to the island of Prinkipo at the beginning of 1072. However, Emperor Michael VII Doukas recalled Dalassene and her children to the imperial court soon after. Emperor Alexios was one of the eight children of Anna Dalassene and John Komnenos, and therefore Anna Dalassene is the paternal grandmother of Anna Komnene.

¹²² James 2008, 645; James and Hill 1999, 173.

¹²³ *Alexiad* 1.8.2 (R-K 30, F 26, S 49, translation adjusted from Sewter 2009).

¹²⁴ See James and Hill 1999, 159, on the authority of widows over their sons.

¹²⁵ Angold 1984, 118.

Book Two: Organiser

In the next phase of her characterisation, Anna Dalassene is depicted as an active woman who, though engaging in a conspiracy against the state, works to ensure the safety of her family. Dalassene organises her daughters and their supporters in order to provide Alexios and Isaac Komnenos with favourable conditions to start their coup. The Komnenoi have targets on their backs, and so the plan begins with a “pretext for an interview” (“ὀμιλίας τὴν καταρχὴν”) with Empress Maria of Alania, which Dalassene arranges on behalf of her sons (“ἡ μήτηρ... ἐπέτρεψε”).¹²⁶ With the empress and the Komnenoi, the two groups who stand to benefit the most from a change in emperor, now in communication and the coup imminent, Dalassene orders (“κελεύει”) her whole household, including her sons, to get ready before first cockcrow to avoid being seen by those who might expose their plans to the emperor.¹²⁷ While her sons race to leave the city and meet their army, Dalassene safely conducts the women of her household to the sanctuary of Hagia Sophia, where one of them lies to the verger to gain entry.¹²⁸ The mother of the Komnenoi is thus depicted as a key component of the coup and the person who holds the responsibility of the lives of her daughters and granddaughters. Dalassene herself, however, is not depicted as ambitious and so the acts of bringing her sons and the empress together and taking the women of her family to a place of sanctuary frame her part in the rebellion as those of a mother who plans only to protect her children.¹²⁹ The household is the one place where women were allotted a more active role, and so the author places the focus on the familial element of organising the rebellion rather than the political.¹³⁰ Dalassene is complicit with the plotting of Isaac, Alexios and the empress and shares in a falsehood to gain entry to a holy place, and these

¹²⁶ *Alexiad* 2.2.2 (R-K 58, F 53, S 76). To provide some context for the coup, Isaac and Alexios Komnenos incite the enmity of two of the emperor’s aides, Germanos and Borilos, and discover that these two men are plotting to ambush them and blind them. Maria of Alania is disenchanted with her husband, Emperor Botaneiates, due to the recent disinheritance of her son Constantine Doukas. So, the empress and the Komnenoi agree to work together with the goals of putting a Komnenos on the throne and reinstating Constantine as a junior emperor.

¹²⁷ *Alexiad* 2.5.1-2 (R-K 65-6, F 59-60, S 83). A grandson of Emperor Botaneiates who was betrothed to one of Dalassene’s granddaughters lived in an apartment in their residence with a tutor, and Dalassene was “terrified” (“ποθηθεῖσα”) that the tutor would report them to the emperor, hence the secrecy of their departure.

¹²⁸ *Alexiad* 2.5.4 (R-K 66-7, F 60, S 83-4): the verger was “not quick to open the doors to them” (“ταχέως αὐταῖς οὐκ ἀπεζύγουν τὰς θύρας”) and asks where they have come from. “Someone of their group” (“εἷς δὲ τις τῶν σὺν αὐταῖς”) says they are women from the East, and “were keen to worship while wishing to return home” (“ἐπισπεύδουσι τὴν προσκύνησιν οἴκαδε ἐθέλουσαι ἐπανελθεῖν,” translation adjusted from Sewter 2009).

¹²⁹ Hill 1999, 81; Laiou 1981, 250. Komnene describes “The Refuge” (“ὁ Προσφύγιον”) where Dalassene and her daughters are sheltering, at *Alexiad* 2.5.4 (R-K 66-7, F 60, S 83-4) as a place “purposely constructed” (“ἐπίτηδες... κατασκευασθέν”) by their ancestors for people who have been accused of something as a place of sanctuary.

¹³⁰ Smythe 1997, 158. See James 2009, 35, and Laiou 1981, 243, on the role of women in the household.

deeds are par for the cause of upholding male authority in the form of putting a son on the throne.

In accordance with her accumulated portrait at this point in the narrative, Anna Dalassene makes a scene in a church to distract the emperor and buy her sons time. The description of Dalassene in Hagia Sophia serves the purpose of not only displaying her piety but also perhaps an awareness of how performances of emotion can be used to produce favourable outcomes. When the envoys of Emperor Botaneiates insist that the Komnenian women should submit to their commands and return to the palace, Anna Dalassene reveals her vexation (“ἀγανακτήσασα”) and demands entrance to the sanctuary of the church so that she may pray to the Mother of God “to furnish an answer in regard to both God and the soul of the emperor” (“χρήσασθαι εἰς τε τὸν Θεὸν καὶ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως ψυχὴν”).¹³¹ The anger of Dalassene suggests that she is in a state of *pathos*, and thus the performance of the emotion functions as a gesture towards societal expectations of women as emotional and weak-willed.¹³² At the same time, her request to pray is an example of religious obedience and therefore virtue.¹³³ Dalassene is allowed in and enhancing her old age and exhaustion (“ὡς οἶον ὑπὸ τοῦ γήρωσ καὶ τῆς λύπης κεκηκυῖα”) she staggers to the doors of the sanctuary, takes hold, and cries:

Unless my hands are cut off, I will not go out of this holy place, unless I receive the cross of the emperor as a pledge of safety.

εἰ μὴ τὰς χεῖρας ἀποτμηθεῖην, οὐκ ἂν τοῦ ἱεροῦ τεμένουσ ἐξέλθοιμι, εἰ μὴ τὸν τοῦ βασιλέωσ ὥσπερ ἐχέγγυον τῆσ σωτηρίασ δεξαίμην σταυρόν.¹³⁴

Dalassene utilises her emotions and religious resources to force a public display of amnesty.¹³⁵ Furthermore, the author depicts Dalassene using her body to emphasise her emotions and call attention to her appearance as a frail old woman, and thus an object of pity rather than, say, of unrestrained sensuality.¹³⁶ The outcome of the demand of Dalassene is that Emperor Botaneiates confines the Komnenian women and their supporters with supplies in the convent of Petron, where they immediately bribe the guards for news of the

¹³¹ *Alexiad* 2.5.6 (R-K 67, F 61, S 84, translation adjusted from Sewter 2009).

¹³² See Neville 2019b, 26, on the idea that women are controlled by their feelings and thus inferior to men.

¹³³ Laiou 1985, 102.

¹³⁴ *Alexiad* 2.5.6 (R-K 67-8, F 61, S 84-5). Translation is my own.

¹³⁵ Smythe 1997, 159.

¹³⁶ See Neville 2019a, 67, on the image of the suffering old widow as a character intended to seem humble and demure. Also, Neville 2019b, 38, on the dangers of an unrestrained woman.

coup and start planning marriage alliances with other aristocratic families.¹³⁷ Dalassene thus stages “a whole domestic revolution” to match the military one taking place at the walls of the city.¹³⁸ At the climax of her part in the rebellion, Anna Dalassene disobeys the authority of the state but under the guise of supplicating God, the higher authority in Byzantium. And though she grows angry, raises her voice and moves unsteadily in the church, she does not do so wildly but as a pitiable, frustrated old woman seeking sanctuary.¹³⁹ The scene in Hagia Sophia serves to distract the emperor and gives Isaac and Alexios time to leave the city. In this sense, Anna Dalassene has used the power she has within the family to lead the other women, not the men, and so she avoids infringing on male authority and thus remains “good.”¹⁴⁰ Her characterisation as pious, worried for her children and politically active serves the Komnenoi well in their aim to change the government. The next book of the *Alexiad* reveals another side of Dalassene and a corresponding change of goal for Komnene.

Book Three: Regent

The centrepiece of Book Three of the *Alexiad* is a lengthy direct quotation of the chrysobull written and signed by Emperor Alexios which transferred total power of the government to his mother.¹⁴¹ The gesture was of immense historical significance, and either side of it in the narrative are lists of the virtues of Anna Dalassene. The characterisation of Dalassene in this book begins, similar to Book One, with her piety and its effect on her son, with no trace of any personal ambition. To resolve his guilt about the damage caused by the coup, Emperor Alexios “went to his mother” (“προσέρχεται τοίνυν τῇ μητρὶ”) and the two of them resolved to meet with the Holy Synod, who ordered that the entire family should do penance for the coup.¹⁴² As the Komnenoi transition from being rebels to the new government, the monastic

¹³⁷ Smythe 1997, 159. *Alexiad* 2.5.8-9 (R-K 68-9, F 62, S 85-6). The women are joined in the convent by the *protovestiaría* Maria of Bulgaria, who has a daughter of marriageable age called Irene Doukaina. Irene Doukaina goes on to become Empress.

¹³⁸ Buckley 2014, 78.

¹³⁹ Neville 2019a, 65-92, includes a discussion of how the authorial persona of Komnene performs the part of the suffering old widow in her authorial intrusions in order to elicit pity from the audience and thus enact a traditional gender role, which would distract readers from the inherently transgressive *masculine* behaviour of being a woman writing a history. It seems a reasonable assertion that one can see here the rhetorical strategy of Komnene being acted out by the character of Anna Dalassene.

¹⁴⁰ Galatariotou 1985, 78.

¹⁴¹ On a historical note, Anna Dalassene was not the first woman to be made regent, but she was one of the few to have an official chrysobull (a decree made by a Byzantine emperor and sealed with gold) which formalised her position. See Garland 1999, 1-2, on the role of the regent. What was perhaps unusual about the arrangement was the fact that Alexios was an adult male in good health.

¹⁴² *Alexiad* 3.5.4 (R-K 99, F 90, S 115). Emperor Alexios is troubled by the damage his coup caused in the city because, “guided by the admonitions of his mother, he had the fear of God deep within him”; “πρὸς τὰς νοθεσίας τῆς μητρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἀπευθύνων τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ φόβον ἐνστερνισάμενος” (*Alexiad* 3.5.1, R-K 97-8, F

desires of Dalassene are underlined repeatedly.¹⁴³ She is described as having monasteries on the mind (“μονὰς διεννοεῖτο”) and fixated on “a higher life” (“πρὸς ὑψηλότερον ἐνητένιζε βίον”).¹⁴⁴ The summarisation of the influence of Anna Dalassene upon palace life could well be the catchphrase of her immortalisation: “she became the standard of behaviour for all, and so the palaces seemed rather to be holy monasteries” (“στάθμη καὶ κανὼν τοῖς πᾶσιν αὐτῇ γεγонуῖα, ὡς τὰ βασιλεία μᾶλλον ἱερὰ φροντιστήρια εἶναι δοκεῖν”).¹⁴⁵ In this way Dalassene is characterised as the engine of piety in the imperial family who keeps her son answerable to God and who leads by example. Religious devotion is one of her guiding principles, second only to her love for her son, and the association of great piety with humility and deference to male authority thereby shields Dalassene from appearing ambitious, a negative connotation for a woman of the imperial family.¹⁴⁶ She dreams of piety rather than power.

In conjunction with the depiction of Anna Dalassene as unassailably devout, Komnene attributes a range of masculine and feminine virtues to the regent and builds a portrait of a woman who appears to represent the intersection of public and private excellence. The demeanour of Dalassene is described as neither “a slackening tenderness” (“τὸ ἀπαλὸν κεχαλασμένον”) nor “undisciplined” (“ἀκόλαστον”), but the meeting point of philanthropy and the majesty of the soul (“κραθέντος τοῦ φιλανθρώπου τῷ τῆς ψυχῆς ἀναστήματι”).¹⁴⁷ She surpassed the celebrated women of the past in self-control by such a great amount that the difference was reckoned as that of the light of the sun in comparison to so many stars (“σωφροσύνη... τοσοῦτον ὑπερῆρε... τὰς πάλαι ὑμνουμένας, περὶ ὧν ὁ πολλὸς λόγος, ὅποσον ἀστέρως ἥλιος”), a comparison that implies hard work on the part of Dalassene.¹⁴⁸ She is generous and compassionate, too, and her house acts as a refuge for poor family members and strangers.¹⁴⁹ In other words, Anna Dalassene possesses the virtues

89, S 113). See *Alexiad* 3.5.5 (R-K 99-100, F 90-91, 115) for the penance, which included fasting, sleeping on the ground and rites to appease the anger of God. Alexios also wore sackcloth under his clothing. Angold 1995, 46, reviews the events after the coup from a historical perspective.

¹⁴³ Buckley 2014, 98.

¹⁴⁴ *Alexiad* 3.6.2 (R-K 100, F 91, S 116). Even once Alexios has made her his regent, she still observes services in the church frequently (3.8.5, R-K 106, F 97, S 122) and shares her meals with priests and monks (3.8.3, R-K 105, F 96, S 121).

¹⁴⁵ *Alexiad* 3.8.2 (R-K 105, F 96, S 129).

¹⁴⁶ Neville 2016, 138.

¹⁴⁷ *Alexiad* 3.8.3 (R-K 105, F 96, S 121, translation adjusted from Sewter 2009).

¹⁴⁸ *Alexiad* 3.8.3 (R-K 105, F 96, S 121, translation adjusted from Sewter 2009); Neville 2019b, 37.

¹⁴⁹ *Alexiad* 3.8.3 (R-K 105, F 96, S 121): “As for her compassion for the poor and her liberality towards those with bound hands, who could express it in words? Her hearth was a common area for the needy of her blood, and no less common to strangers”, “τὸν δὲ περὶ τοὺς πένητας οἶκτον αὐτῆς καὶ τὴν δαμιλῆ πρὸς τοὺς δεομένους χεῖρα τίς παραστήσειε λόγος; κοινὸν μὲν ἦν ἡ αὐτῆς ἐστία καταγώγιον τοῖς ἐξ αἵματος πενομένοις, κοινὸν δὲ καὶ ξένοις οὐχ’ ἦττον.” Later in the *Alexiad*, Anna Dalassene contributes her personal wealth to help Alexios restore the army (*Alexiad* 5.2.1, R-K 143-4, F 130, S 157).

of the ideal Christian woman.¹⁵⁰ Yet, at the same time, she is well-equipped in a practical manner to rule in place of her son. Dalassene was “most dexterous concerning public affairs, with an ingenuity for ordinance and appointments” (“περὶ τὰ πράγματα δεξιωτάτη καὶ τάξαι καὶ καταστήσασθαι πολιτείαν εὐμήχανος”).¹⁵¹ And, as was foreshadowed in Hagia Sophia, “she was very much so indeed a most persuasive orator” (“ἦν αὐτόχρημα ῥήτωρ πιθανωτάτη”) with a mind to match her tongue (“καὶ οὐκ ἦν μὲν τὴν γνώμην τοιαύτη, γλῶτταν δὲ εἶχεν ἀπάδουσαν πρὸς τὴν γνώμην”), traits which could have been considered dangerous in Byzantium.¹⁵² Perhaps pre-empting concerns from traditionally-minded readers about how to rule the empire without making eye-contact, the author comes to a compromise; men lacking in prudence (“ἄνθρωποις δὲ μὴ ἐχέφροσιν”) feel no support (“ἀνύποιστος”) in her gaze, while to those with self-control (“τοῖς δ’... σωφροσύνης”) Dalassene seems kind and gentle (“ίλαρά τε καὶ προσηνής”).¹⁵³ And due to the combination of these virtues, Anna Komnene appears justified in speaking thusly of her grandmother:

her level was not only best of all women, but men too; she was an adornment of humankind.

ἀξίωμα μὲν οὖν μέγιστον αὐτῇ οὐ γυναικῶν μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρρένων καθίστατο καὶ κόσμος τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως.¹⁵⁴

The characterisation of Anna Dalassene thereby floats free of the confines of societal expectations for a moment, and she is rendered genderless, or multi-gendered, capable of any task one could throw at her.¹⁵⁵ Effort and self-control, the portrayal of Dalassene seems to suggest, underline attempts to be good and virtuous, and men do not hold the monopoly of such attributes.¹⁵⁶ And, as if to make the point that Anna Dalassene has all the necessary qualities of a leader incontrovertible, Komnene provides an entire chrysobull, as written by Alexios I Komnenos, as evidence.¹⁵⁷

The depiction of Anna Dalassene in Book Three also contains a notable absence of any ambition for the power to rule. Indeed, Alexios is depicted as the driving force behind

¹⁵⁰ Smyth 1997, 161; Buckler 1929, 111, 130.

¹⁵¹ *Alexiad* 3.7.2 (R-K 103, F 94, S 119).

¹⁵² *Alexiad* 3.7.3 (R-K 104, F 94, S 119). See Neville 2019b, 39, on the dangers of women’s speech.

¹⁵³ *Alexiad* 3.8.3 (R-K 105, F 96, S 121).

¹⁵⁴ *Alexiad* 3.8.2 (R-K 105, F 96, S 120). Translation is my own.

¹⁵⁵ See Buckley 2014, 100, on the idea of Dalassene reforming the government to an “ungendered model.” Note also that Anna Dalassene is not described in a physical sense in the *Alexiad*.

¹⁵⁶ See Neville 2019b, 27, on the idea that Byzantine women could cultivate strength of character and surpass their innate disposition.

¹⁵⁷ Neville 2016, 77.

her appointment, and the amiability of Dalassene to the task is framed as that of a mother doing her best to assist her son. By being a good mother, she comes to hold power over even the emperor whilst still remaining subservient to the patriarchal family structure. Alexios longs for his mother instead of himself to be the helmsman of the empire (“οἰακοστρόφον δὲ μᾶλλον ἑαυτοῦ τὴν μητέρα ἰμειρόμενος εἶναι”).¹⁵⁸ He involves her in affairs of the state (“αὐτῇ καὶ κοινοποιούμενος τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων διοίκησιν”), and the author describes Dalassene as loving of her son (“ἦν γε καὶ φιλόπαις”) and “wishing to bear along with [him] the seas of dominion” both when “the ship runs with a fair wind or with waves striking from every side” (“ἠβούλετο συνδιενεγκεῖν μετὰ τοῦ υἱοῦ τὸ τῆς βασιλείας κλυδώνιον καὶ οὐριοδρομοῦσαν τὴν ναῦν ἢ καὶ πανταχόθεν βαλλομένην τοῖς κύμασιν”).¹⁵⁹ In fact, Dalassene is so gripped by motherly love that she does rule with him (“τὸ τοίνυν μητρῶον πάθος κατεῖχεν αὐτήν, καὶ συνδιεκυβέρνα τῷ υἱῷ”), and thus feminine *pathos* and control of the state commingle “with no offence and no sin” (“ἀπροσπταίστως τὲ καὶ ἀναμαρτήτως”).¹⁶⁰ The author continues in a similar fashion:

He had imperial regalia, but she held dominion... one might think he was the instrument of her power, not emperor.

ἐκεῖνος μὲν γὰρ σχῆμα βασιλείας εἶχεν, ἡ δὲ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτήν... ὡς οὕτω γε φάσαι, ὄργανον ἦν αὐτῇ βασιλείας, οὐ βασιλεύς.¹⁶¹

Dalassene thus leads the government to fulfil the desires of her son, and so the image of a woman fulfilling her duty to her family supersedes any trace of personal ambition.¹⁶² There is no lust for power in her depiction, nor is she granted an official title.¹⁶³ Rather, she is characterised as a good mother who would do anything to help her children, even if by running her household she should also come to run the Byzantine Empire.¹⁶⁴ The assertion that Dalassene can be gripped by the *pathos* of familial love while ruling herself and the state is a remarkable testament to her self-control and perhaps constitutes a challenge to the image of the idealised masculine (and therefore dispassionate) Byzantine ruler. The power is given to her by a man, her son, and thus she submits to his authority by ruling in his place.

¹⁵⁸ *Alexiad* 3.6.1 (R-K 100, F 91, S 116).

¹⁵⁹ *Alexiad* 3.6.1 (R-K 100, F 91, S 116); 3.6.2 (R-K 100, F 91-2, S 116). Translations adjusted from Sewter 2009.

¹⁶⁰ *Alexiad* 3.6.2 (R-K 100, F 91-2, S 116).

¹⁶¹ *Alexiad* 3.7.5 (R-K 104, F 95, S 120). Translation is my own.

¹⁶² Buckley 2014, 100.

¹⁶³ Neville 2016, 77.

¹⁶⁴ See Laiou 1981, 243, on the ideology of women running the household.

Alexiad 3.7.3 and Euripides' Phoinissai

The intertextual relationship between the *Alexiad* and Euripides' *Phoinissai* further underlines the intrinsic tension of remaining subservient to the patriarchal family structure of Byzantine society while exercising power over the state. Jocasta and Anna Dalassene are both depicted in maternal roles with a tendency to show political initiative, yet the outcome of their involvement in male-dominated affairs is vastly different. The discourse on the use of classical models from Attic tragedy in the *Alexiad* has been dominated by their occurrences in the lamentations of the authorial persona, and so this quotation from the *Phoinissai* appears to have been neglected by other scholars.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Penelope Buckley argued that “there are no metaphors or classical allusions” in the passages concerning Dalassene.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, this chapter finds itself in direct conflict with prior scholarship. The relevant passages in the *Alexiad* and the *Phoinissai* will now be examined and some conclusions on the depiction of Anna Dalassene and her positions of power will follow.

The perceptible connection between the *Alexiad* and the *Phoinissai* occurs in the midst of Komnene's descriptions of Anna Dalassene. After the quotation of chrysobull which legitimised the powers given to Anna Dalassene by Emperor Alexios, the author pre-emptively the imagined censure of the audience. One might blame Alexios “for the management thus having been entrusted to the women's quarters for the administration of the empire” (“καταμέμψοιτο τὴν οἰκονομίαν ὡς γυναικωνίτιδι καταπιστεύσαντος... τὴν τῆς βασιλείας διοίκησιν”), but they should not because, as the surrounding passages show, Dalassene has the right skills for the task.¹⁶⁷ This statement is followed by an appraisal of Dalassene's aptitude for organisation and her ability as an orator, as discussed above, and then Komnene comments on the age and experience of Dalassene:

It stands that someone, when it seemed they were of an age such as this, should not only speak with greater wisdom than the young, as the tragedy says, but also act in a more expedient way.

ἔχει δὲ ἡ τοιαύτη ὡς τὸ εἰκὸς ἡλικία οὐ μόνον **τί λέξαι τῶν νέων σοφώτερον**, ὡς ἡ τραγωδία φησὶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ συμφερότερον πράξαι.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, Neville 2016, 65-8, and Vilimonović 2018, 143-62.

¹⁶⁶ Buckley 2014, 101.

¹⁶⁷ *Alexiad* 3.7.2 (R-K 103, F 94, S 119, translation adjusted from Sewter 2009).

¹⁶⁸ *Alexiad* 3.7.3 (R-K 104, F 94-5, S 119). The translation and emphasis are my own.

The author thus quotes “the tragedy” as evidence for her logic regarding the reasons why Dalassene is suited to rule, and the message seems to be that the age of Dalassene is an advantage for the government because she has more experience when it comes to saying and doing the right thing than the young or, it is implied, her son. The quotation of the *Phoinissai*, as signposted by the mention of “the tragedy” (“ἡ τραγωδία”), forms the base of this defence of Dalassene’s age and also testifies to the agency inherent in her position of power; she may speak (“λέξει”) and act (“πράξει”).¹⁶⁹ The agency of Anna Dalassene in her role as regent is thereby rendered undeniable, and perhaps cunningly tucked into an aphorism to minimise its impact.

Furthermore, by connecting the linguistic similarities of *Alexiad* 3.7.3 and the *Phoinissai*, the differences in the portrayals of the maternal roles of Anna Dalassene and Jocasta reveal a positive assessment of a woman in a position of power in the *Alexiad*. In the *agōn* of the *Phoinissai*, Eteocles declares that he seeks possession of tyranny (506, “Τυραννίδα”) above all else and will not submit Thebes to his brother, and thus Jocasta, in the role of mediator, admonishes Eteocles for his dedication to a dangerous goal (528-30):

Oh child, not all that is added to old age is bad,
Eteocles; experience, which may speak
more wisely than youth, holds fast.

ὦ τέκνον, οὐχ ἅπαντα τῶι γήρῳ κακά,
Ἐτεόκλεες, πρόσεστιν· ἀλλ’ ἡμπεριία
ἔχει **τι λέξει τῶν νέων σοφώτερον.**¹⁷⁰

The subtext is that Eteocles is too young to know what he is doing, and Jocasta goes on to decry his pursuit of Ambition (“Φιλοτιμίας”), whom she labels “an unjust goddess” (“ἄδικος ἢ θεός”).¹⁷¹ Jocasta, like Dalassene, has undertaken a masculine role, not as ruler but mediator to her sons, and though she takes part in a crisis which is both familial and political,

¹⁶⁹ *Alexiad* 3.7.3 (R-K 104, F 94-5, S 119).

¹⁷⁰ *Phoinissai* 528-30. I use Diggle 1994 as my text. The translation and emphasis are my own. For a helpful introduction to the play and its staging, see Lamari 2017, 258-69, who also discusses the probable dates for the performance of the play (likely 411, 410 or 409 BCE), and Scharffenberger 2015, 292-319. Lamari 2017, 258, states that the *Phoinissai* was extremely popular in antiquity, as evidenced by an Aristophanic homonymous comedy intended as a parody (fr. 570 K-A) and the fact that the extant number of papyri surpasses all other tragic texts. The tragedy was also one of the three Euripidean plays that formed “the Byzantine triad”, alongside *Orestes* and *Hecuba*, which was taught in schools in the Byzantine period. To provide some more context for the lines, Jocasta has arranged a meeting with Eteocles, who currently withholds the right to rule Thebes from his brother in violation of their agreement of ruling in alternating years, and Polynices, who is in charge of an Argive army and seeks to besiege the city in order to take his turn to rule.

¹⁷¹ *Phoinissai* 532.

her good council is ignored and the situation escalates.¹⁷² All three of the main actors of the *Phoinissai* are dead before its culmination, and so ignoring the advice of Jocasta proves fatal for all. And whereas Jocasta has wisdom but ineffective power, Anna Dalassene possesses both agency and sons who adhere to her advice.¹⁷³ Alexios always listened to his mother (“his sense of hearing [was dedicated] to hearing her words,” “τὴν ἀκοὴν τῶν ἐκείνης φωνῶν εἰς ἀκρόασιν”), and thus the Komnenoi avoided repeating the example of the house of Oedipus.¹⁷⁴ Jocasta and Anna Dalassene represent women with initiative who take on roles typically reserved for men whilst never ceasing to be primarily concerned with the safety of their family.¹⁷⁵ However, the outcome for their families differs vastly, and so the family unity of the Komnenoi, under the guidance of Dalassene, is backlit by a tragic source text which in turn emphasises the lack of self-serving attitudes among the ranks of the new imperial family, and therefore their unity.¹⁷⁶ Komnene’s depiction of Anna Dalassene thus abides by the traditional ideology that women may show authority in the household while also suggesting that portraying power without personal ambition is an appropriate compromise to make in the representation of Byzantine women in positions of power in literature.

Conclusion: Entrusting the Government of the Empire to the Women’s Quarters

Anna Dalassene is depicted as the subject of *pathos* at several points in the narrative, but the overall impression her character leaves is that of a woman with self-control who selflessly serves her family and sought to make life easier for her son, the emperor Alexios. She is primarily identified as a loving mother with religious concerns at heart who dreams of serving God but remains loyal to her family unit and its patriarchal structure by paradoxically accepting the role of regent of the state. Anna Dalassene conspires against the government of Emperor Botaneiates, but she is never described as ambitious, rather the reader is encouraged to pity her as she stumbles under the weight of age and her own Christian concerns in Hagia Sophia. Perhaps pre-empting criticism of her appointment to the head of the government, Komnene attributes a range of feminine- and masculine-coded virtues to Dalassene, and though she governs from the women’s quarters she is portrayed as

¹⁷² Papadopoulou 2008, 50, 53. Part of the reason Jocasta’s mediation proves ineffectual is because of the family curse, because it is a tragedy, after all, and so the genre has its limitations for showing feminine agency.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷⁴ *Alexiad* 3.7.4 (R-K 104, F 95, S 120, translation adjusted from Sewter 2009).

¹⁷⁵ Papadopoulou 2008, 50.

¹⁷⁶ Even when Isaac and Alexios bicker in a later chapter of the *Alexiad* (8.8.4, R-K 254-5, F 232, S 265), they still report to their mother, and so the reader is reminded that family unity comes first for Anna Dalassene.

well-equipped to act and speak as befits the traditionally masculine role she fills. Komnene's depiction of Anna Dalassene endows her with agency, but that agency is figured as deference to the male authority wielded by her son, and so her role in the empire is treated as an extension of the maternal one she holds in the family unit. An intertextual approach to her characterisation reveals a link between Dalassene and Jocasta, but a sharp contrast between their fates. Anna Dalassene clearly holds a position of power in the *Alexiad*, but this power is derived from her son and it lasts for as long as Alexios chooses to listen. Yet, the inclusion of states of *pathos* in Dalassene's characterisation should not be overlooked. The rhetorical purpose of the regent's performance of the emotions of anger, love and grief perhaps suggests that Komnene sought to depict a woman who could rule and feel.

Chapter 5: Gaita of Salerno and Emma of Hauteville

The following discussion focuses on the literary representation of Gaita of Salerno and Emma of Hauteville in the narrative of the *Alexiad* and the layers of intertextual meanings which can be perceived upon a close reading of the passages featuring their characterisation. The chapter begins with a study of the roles which Gaita performs in the text, followed by an analysis of the passage of the Battle of Dyrrakhion and several of the detectable source texts therein. This analysis will show that although Komnene attributes courage and the traits of a good general to Gaita, the purpose of her performance of gendered roles appears to be in the service of the emasculation of the male Norman soldiers she commands. The role of Emma, a much shorter passage by comparison, and subsequently the theatre she stages from setting a trap for the bumbling Byzantine naval commander Kontostephanos will then be scrutinised, revealing that the men of Byzantium were liable to be ill-disciplined too, and a clever woman could deploy a ruse to capitalise on their arrogance. Gaita and Emma grew up and came to prominence in southern Italy, not Byzantium, yet the cultural norms and gender expectations they were conditioned by were similar to those of the society of Komnene and her imperial family.¹⁷⁷ As this study seeks to understand the purpose of Byzantine depictions of gender and their rhetorical goals in literature, Gaita and Emma are inevitably viewed through the lens of Byzantine assumptions concerning other races. Komnene judged the inhabitants of Italy to be barbarians, and so this discussion will take the prejudice of the author and its effects on her literary rendering of the Italo-Norman women in the narrative into account.¹⁷⁸ However, despite the racial bias, the rhetorical purpose of their performances of gender in the text seems to be support for the idea that when men or masculinity was absent, women could adapt, be brave and provide leadership.

Wife, Adviser and Warrior

Gaita the Lombard princess of Salerno and Duchess of Apulia was the second wife of Robert Guiscard, one of the major Norman adversaries of Emperor Alexios.¹⁷⁹ The role of Gaita as

¹⁷⁷ See Smith 2004, 18-19, and Skinner 2001, 4, for the similar social norms regarding gender in the western medieval world.

¹⁷⁸ According to the TLG the adjective “βάρβαρος, -ov” is used 248 times in the *Alexiad*, and Komnene uses it in reference to Normans, Kelts, Latins, Franks, Turks and anyone else who is not Roman, or rather Greek or Armenian to a modern scholar of Byzantine studies.

¹⁷⁹ Komnene calls her “Gaita” (“Γάιτα”) but she is also known in other sources as “Sikelgaita” or “Sichelgaita.” Of the three Norman women who appear as individuals in the *Alexiad* Gaita has received the most attention in secondary sources, but even so her bibliography is slight. Both Skinner 2000, 622-41, and Eads 2005, 72-87, provide helpful overviews of her career. Loud 2000, 127, reports that Gaita was the sister of Prince Gisulf II of Salerno and her marriage to Robert Guiscard occurred in 1058. Gaita and Guiscard had ten children together

wife and political adviser is central to her characterisation, and so she first enters the narrative in Book One during Komnene’s portrait of Guiscard and the description of his preliminary machinations against the Byzantine Empire. The “most unscrupulous Robert” (“ὁ Ῥομπέρτος ῥαδιουργότατος”) had been trying to find grounds to attack the Byzantines for a long time, but Gaita and his other close advisers persuaded him from doing so because it would be the “beginning of an unjust war and directly against Christians” (“ἀδίκων πολέμων ἄρχων καὶ κατὰ Χριστιανῶν εὐτρεπιζόμενος”).¹⁸⁰ Gaita, a voice of reason to the bellicose Robert Guiscard, is thus endowed with the positive and traditionally feminine attribute of being concerned to avoid Christian-against-Christian bloodshed.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, Guiscard appears to take the opinion of his wife and adviser into account. When he receives news concerning his pretext for war on Byzantium, Guiscard immediately reads the letter to his “bed-fellow” Gaita (“παρευθὺς μὲν τῇ ὁμευνέτιδι ὑπαναγινώσκει”).¹⁸² Only once Gaita has heard the news does Guiscard then read the message to his other advisers.¹⁸³ He has his reason to campaign against the Byzantines, yet Guiscard does not make another move until he has convinced Gaita and his advisers that he can justify the action. Komnene thus implies that the approval of Gaita is crucial to the political decisions of her husband, and Guiscard did not attack the Byzantine Empire any earlier because he deferred to Gaita in her role as

(see Loud 2000, 300, for a genealogical table). H. Bloch 1986, 84, as reported in Skinner 2000, 640 n.46, states that Gaita died on 16 April 1090 and was buried in the atrium of the abbey of Montecassino.

¹⁸⁰ *Alexiad* 1.12.8 (R-K 41, F 36, S 59). The *ODB* states that Robert Guiscard was born around 1015 and that his last name translates to “wily” in Old French (s.v. “Robert Guiscard,” 1991). G. A. Loud asserts that Guiscard was actually born Robert Hauteville, after the name of the village in Normandy of which his father Tancred was the lord. See Loud 2000, 1-11, for an introduction to Robert Guiscard and his conquest of southern Italy followed by 209-23 for his campaigns against the Byzantine Empire. Prior to Loud 2000, Chalandon 1907 was the leading scholarly narrative on the Norman conquest. For a western account of the life of Guiscard, see the Latin hexameter poem the *Gesta Roberti Wiscardi* (or *GRW*) written by William of Apulia between 1095-1099 and dedicated to Guiscard’s son Roger Borsa. As the texts do narrate some of the same events, see Frankopan 2013, 80-99, and Albu 1975 for comparative literature analyses of the *GRW* and the *Alexiad*.

¹⁸¹ Buckler 1929, 98; Skinner 2000, 622. A touch of scorn can be detected in the words which Komnene puts in the mouth of Gaita because she seems to say to her husband that he would “well and truly” be pitting himself against other Christians as indicated by prefix of the participle “εὐτρεπιζόμενος.” Christian-against-Christian warfare and what constitutes a “just war” to a Christian leader is a fairly complicated topic, and one which comes to a head in the 13th century. See Kolbaba 1998, 194-221, and Gallagher 2008, 592-8, for an introduction to the topic.

¹⁸² *Alexiad* 1.12.9 (R-K 42, F 37, S 60). The news comes in the form of a letter from a monk who has agreed with Guiscard in secret to impersonate the deposed emperor Michael VII Doukas, in order to provide the Normans with a pretender to champion and therefore an excuse for war. The letter, Komnene reports in 1.12.8, read “Your kinsman Michael, the one expelled from the empire, accepted the help from you, having been asked”; “ὁ σὸς κηδεστὴς Μιχαὴλ ὁ τῆς βασιλείας ἐξεωθεὶς κατέλαβε τὴν ἀπὸ σοῦ ἐξαιτούμενος βοήθειαν” (R-K 42, F 37, S 60). Komnene insinuates that Gaita and the advisers of Guiscard were ignorant to the fact that Guiscard had hired a monk to pretend to be Michael.

¹⁸³ *Alexiad* 1.12.9 (R-K 42, F 37, S 60): “Then he gathered together all the counts and, again privately, showed them the letter”; “εἶτα συναγαγὼν τοὺς κόμητας ἅπαντας ὑποδείκνυσι καὶ τούτοις τὰ γράμματα.”

adviser.¹⁸⁴ Komnene thus portrays Gaita as a wife who displays traditional feminine care for her husband and his spiritual wellbeing, yet who also actively engages with politics and diplomatic affairs.¹⁸⁵ The impression that Komnene gives upon introducing Gaita to the narrative is not that of a woman who is eager to start a war, but rather one who is concerned to keep her husband from incurring the wrath of God.

Gaita is also depicted as an agent in military scenarios too, and not just as a companion to her husband, but as a leader and a soldier. When Robert Guiscard prepares to invade the Byzantine Empire, he arrives at Otranto, a city on the north-east edge of Italy, and “eagerly waits for his wife Gaita” (“τὴν γυναῖκα Γάιταν ἀπεκδεχόμενος”).¹⁸⁶ Gaita arrived, presumably with another part of the army, Guiscard “took her into his arms” (“ἐνηγκαλίσσατο ταύτην”) and then they departed “with the entire army” (“ὅλῳ στρατεύματι”) for Brindisi, a city further north.¹⁸⁷ Gaita appears to be in charge of her own troops, troops which Guiscard deemed inexpedient to leave behind or advance too far ahead of.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, Gaita in her role of military leader is a constituent part of the Norman army. Komnene is quick to clarify that the participation of Gaita in the Byzantine campaign was not unusual, and that the image of Gaita dressed in her armour preceded her.¹⁸⁹ Gaita usually went on expeditions with her husband (“αὐτὴ ζυνεστράτευε τῷ ἀνδρὶ”) and Komnene relates the impression the duchess left upon her sources: “what a fearful thing the woman was when fully armed” (“χρῆμα ἦν ἡ γυνὴ φοβερόν, ἐπειδὴν ἐξοπλίσαιτο”).¹⁹⁰ Reports of such behaviour, it is fair to say, would have raised eyebrows in the Byzantine court as martial

¹⁸⁴ Hill 2000, 57; Eads 2005, 74. One could add that Guiscard listens to the advice of Gaita if only to reach the understanding that he needs to find a more convincing excuse to launch the campaign. Komnene at no point indicates that Gaita was in on the plot to champion a fake pretender.

¹⁸⁵ Advising a husband in a position of political power was inadvisable for Byzantine women, as male Byzantine authors often show contempt towards women occupying roles in the public arena of politics; see, for example, McGrath 2012 on Skylitzes. Gaita, however, seems to only advise Guiscard behind closed doors.

¹⁸⁶ *Alexiad* 1.15.1 (R-K 48, F 43, S 66).

¹⁸⁷ *Alexiad* 1.15.1 (R-K 48, F 43, S 66).

¹⁸⁸ Eads 2005, 74. See also the *GRW* 4.159-62 and 4.185, which features two further examples of Gaita arriving with more troops to the location of Guiscard. See Skinner 2001, 136-41, who details the life of Matilda of Tuscany, another woman who had a reputation as a warrior. See also page 55, where Skinner briefly mentions another Lombard princess Rumetruda, who started a war between the Lombards and the Heruli when she stabbed a man for being rude to her.

¹⁸⁹ Compare the behaviour of the Empress Irene Doukaina with her “innate modesty” (“ἡ σύμφυτος αἰδῶς”) who goes on campaign with her husband Alexios, but only to stay at camp and help soothe his gout (*Alexiad* 12.3.4, R-K 365, F 338, S 375).

¹⁹⁰ *Alexiad* 1.15.1 (R-K 48, F 43, S 66). Komnene was not alive at the beginning of the Norman campaigns, which lasted several years (1081-5), so her sources for these scenes were most likely her uncle George Palaiologos, Emperor Alexios himself, and “the fathers and grandfathers of some men alive today” (*Alexiad Pr.* 2.3, “ἐνίων γὰρ τῶν νῦν ὄντων ἀνθρώπων οἱ μὲν πατέρες, οἱ δὲ πάπποι”, R-K 7, F 4, S 18). See Loud 1991, 41-57, for a discussion of Komnene’s sources for the Normans.

valour was not considered an appropriately feminine pursuit.¹⁹¹ Georgina Buckler argues that Komnene “deprecates” the act of women joining the fighting as “unwomanly,” but there is no evidence of deprecation in the passages concerning Gaita because awe or fear are not the same as disapproval, a feeling which Komnene does not shy away from expressing.¹⁹² If anything, Komnene registers curiosity in the sight of Gaita in armour and on the battlefield.¹⁹³ Indeed as evidence for her active military lifestyle, Gaita is routinely so close to the action she almost gets captured during a battle with the Venetians in a later book.¹⁹⁴ The armour that makes Gaita look so impressive is not an accessory, but a practical necessity for a duchess with a habit of accompanying her husband into the thick of battle.¹⁹⁵ Thus Komnene does not doubt or deprecate the courage of Gaita in her characterisation, but seems to “pay tribute” to it.¹⁹⁶ Gaita is not only involved with Guiscard’s policy decisions, but also his martial activity, and thus as the Norman campaign builds Komnene narrates several assaults upon Byzantine expectations of gendered behaviour.

In conjunction with her characterisation as a military commander and political adviser, Komnene characterises Gaita as a devoted wife. As mentioned above, Robert Guiscard takes Gaita into his arms in what one could easily imagine is an affectionate embrace when she meets him at Otranto after their separation for battle preparations (“ἐνηγκαλίσσατο ταύτην”).¹⁹⁷ Furthermore, Komnene dramatizes the presence of Gaita at the death of her husband. Guiscard’s involvement in campaigns against the Byzantine Empire ends in Book Six when he is possessed by a violent fever (“λάβρω κατέχεται πυρετῶ”).¹⁹⁸ Guiscard manages to last six days before dying (“τέως δι’ ἕξ ἡμερῶν τελευτᾷ”) and Gaita reaches him “at his last breath” (“καταλαμβάνει δὲ τοῦτον τὰ ἔσχατα πνέοντα ἢ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ Γάιτα”).¹⁹⁹ The arrival of Gaita for the final moments of the life of her husband adds to the drama of the scene and enhances the impression of their devotion to one another as husband

¹⁹¹ Reinsch 2000, 94. See McLaughlin 1990, 193-209, for more accounts of women warriors in the medieval period. Cf. *Alexiad* 12.3.8 (R-K 367, F 339-40, S 377), where Komnene describes the weapons appropriate for peaceful women.

¹⁹² Buckler 1929, 116 n.10. Reinsch 2000, 95, also notes that there is “something offensive” about Gaita on the battlefield. However, for examples of disapproval, see Komnene on Pope Gregory VII (*Alexiad* 1.13.3-7, R-K 43-5, F 38-40, S 62-4) or Italos (5.8.6-8).

¹⁹³ Skinner 2000, 623, notes that Komnene’s portrait of Gaita on the battlefield at Dyrrakhion (see below) was written before the later crusades “made warlike women a more visible (and fashionable?) phenomenon.”

¹⁹⁴ *Alexiad* 6.5.9: “for a short time they prevailed to bind both he who was the legitimate son of Guiscard, Guy, and his bed-fellow”, “μικροῦ δὲ δεῖν καὶ αὐτὸν τὸν γνήσιον υἱὸν αὐτοῦ Γίδον καὶ τὴν ὁμευνέτιν κατέσχον” (R-K 178, F 162, S 191, translation adjusted from Sewter 2009).

¹⁹⁵ Eads 2005, 79. Cf. *Alexiad* 12.3.8 (R-K 366-7, F 339, S 377) where empress Irene Doukaina goes on campaign with Alexios but stays off the battlefield.

¹⁹⁶ Buckley 2014, 73.

¹⁹⁷ *Alexiad* 1.15.1 (R-K 48, F 43, S 66).

¹⁹⁸ *Alexiad* 6.6.1 (R-K 179, F 163, S 192).

¹⁹⁹ *Alexiad* 6.6.2; 6.6.3 (R-K 180, F 163, S 192).

and wife.²⁰⁰ The path of action that Gaita takes to support her husband, including fighting for his army on the battlefield, does not stay within the boundaries of appropriate Byzantine feminine behaviour. D. R. Reinsch claimed that Komnene’s attitude towards Gaita’s conduct was “ambivalent,” yet the evidence in the text suggests the author held a decidedly more appreciative opinion of the Duchess of Apulia.²⁰¹ Where Komnene reveals an even stronger stance, however, is in her determination to depict Robert Guiscard as so dedicated to the good will of Gaita that he needs her permission to invade the Byzantine Empire, and to die. The Duchess of Apulia has command of his armies and of his heart.

***Alexiad* 4.6.5: Pallas, Athene and a Homeric Expression**

Anna Komnene places Gaita of Apulia centre stage in a passage in Book Four during the Norman campaigns against the Byzantine Empire. The Battle of Dyrrakhion took place in 1081, the first year of Alexios’ reign, and was a significant win for Robert Guiscard. Gaita plays a key part in the battle:

The story goes that Gaita, the wife of Robert joining him on campaign, was another Pallas, if not Athene. She saw the fleeing men and glared at them sharply, and then letting loose, in a singular fashion, in the loudest voice that Homeric expression (in her own dialect) that it had been custom to say: “How far will you flee? Make a stand! Be men!” But she saw them fleeing still, and she grasped a large spear and hurled herself at full gallop against those taking flight. Seeing this apparition, the men returned to their senses and summoned themselves back to fight again.

ἡ δέ γε Γάιτα, ὡς λόγος τίς φησίν, ἢ τοῦ Ῥομπέρτου σύνευνος αὐτῶ
συστρατευομένη Παλλὰς ἄλλη κἄν μὴ Ἀθήνη, θεασαμένη τοὺς φεύγοντας
δριμὺν τούτοις ἐνατενίσασα κατ’ αὐτῶν μεγίστην ἀφεῖσα φωνὴν μονοβοῦ τὸ
ὀμηρικὸν ἐκεῖνο ἔπος τῇ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λέγειν ἐφκει· “μέχρι πόσου
φεύξεσθε; στήτε, ἄνδρες ἐστέ.” ὡς δὲ ἔτι φεύγοντας τούτους ἑώρα, δόρυ
μακρὸν ἐναγκαλισαμένη ὄλους ῥυτῆρας ἐνδοῦσα κατὰ τῶν φευγόντων ἵεται·
τοῦτο θεασάμενοι καὶ ἑαυτῶν γεγονότες αὐτῆς πρὸς μάχην ἑαυτοὺς
ἀνεκαλέσαντο.²⁰²

The story which Komnene tells begins with two pieces of information concerning Gaita which the reader has heard before: Gaita is the wife of Robert Guiscard and she accompanies

²⁰⁰ Hill 2000, 57-8. Cf. *Alexiad* 15.11.1-24 (R-K 493-505, F 463-73, S 505-15), where Komnene gives a lengthy account of the final illness and death of Alexios Komnenos and the emotions of the women who surround him on his deathbed.

²⁰¹ Reinsch 2000, 95.

²⁰² *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147). The translation is my own.

him on campaign.²⁰³ Gaita is then likened to Pallas and Athene, two figures from Greek mythology, and these comparisons are inspired by her reaction to seeing Norman troops fleeing the battlefield. She glares fiercely and then shouts words which could have been Homeric but for the fact they were in her own language, Latin, and not in Greek. When her voice proves ineffective, Gaita acts and charges at her own men. The image of the Duchess of Apulia, astride a horse, presumably in her signature armour, carrying a giant spear and charging down upon them stops the soldiers in their flight and turns them back to the battle. The Byzantine army begins to crumble and Alexios narrowly escapes capture with immense help from his divinely inspired warhorse.²⁰⁴ The city of Dyrrakhion then submits to Robert Guiscard.

One possible reading of the intertextuality of this passage is an amplification of the military threat which Gaita posed on the battlefield at Dyrrakhion. Komnene describes Gaita on the battlefield at Dyrrakhion as “another Pallas” (“Παλλάς ἄλλη”).²⁰⁵ The name “Pallas” belongs to several figures throughout Greek mythology, but as Komnene mentions Gaita’s predilection for joining her husband on campaign (“συστρατευομένη”) and immediately follows this comparison with “if not Athene” (“κἄν μὴ Ἀθήνη”) the semiotic field of the goddess of warfare, one of Athene’s major roles, provides a clue for addressing the multivalence of the first mythical comparison.²⁰⁶ Furthermore, the proper noun “Παλλάς” is feminine in agreement with its grammatical unit, so the male bearers of the name including perhaps the most famous one, Pallas the giant, are suppressed.²⁰⁷ According to passage 3.144 of the *Bibliotheca* of Pseudo-Apollodorus, the river god Triton had a daughter called Pallas (“θυγάτηρ ἦν Παλλάς”).²⁰⁸ In this version of the myth, Athena was brought up by Triton

²⁰³ Cf. *Alexiad* 1.15.1 (R-K 48, F 43, S 66): “and [Robert] eagerly awaits for his wife Gaita (for she joined in expeditions with her husband...)”; “καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα Γάιταν ἀπεκδεχόμενος (καὶ γὰρ καὶ αὐτὴ ξυνεστράτευε τῷ ἀνδρί...)”

²⁰⁴ *Alexiad* 4.6.7 (R-K 134-5, F 122, S 148); 4.7.2 (R-K 137, F 124, S 150).

²⁰⁵ *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147).

²⁰⁶ See Deacy 2008, 3-14, for a more recent study of the goddess Athene and her attributes.

²⁰⁷ Searching for “Pallas” in reference texts is a good example of how complex and entangled mythological matters can be, especially given that “Pallas” is also a masculine name. For example, the *Suda* lists “Παλλάς” as an epithet of Athene (“ἐπίθετον Ἀθηνᾶς”) derived from either shaking her spear (“πάλλειν τὸ δόρυ”) or having killed Pallas the giant (“ἀνηρηκεῖναι Πάλλαντα, ἓνα τῶν Γιγάντων”, *pi* 50). Likewise, the *OCD* has two entries under “Pallas”, the first of which defines it as a name of Athena derived from a playmate she accidentally killed or from the giant she intentionally killed (s.v. “Pallas (1),” 2005). The second entry in the *OCD* gives the Attic hero Pallas, and the son of Evander from Virgil’s *Aeneid* (s.v. “Pallas (2),” 2005). Edmunds (2001, 147) argues that to quote a myth is to give a particular version of the myth, but this version “cannot suppress the others”, and so in the process of limiting the intertextual gesture of Komnene likening Gaita to Pallas to one version of the myth, further analysis inevitably necessarily proceeds with a degree of tension.

²⁰⁸ I use Wagner 1965, 148, as my text for the *Bibliotheca*. The attribution of the *Bibliotheca* to Apollodorus of Athens has long been doubted, so I follow the majority of scholars in citing the author as Pseudo-

(“γεννηθεῖσαν... παρὰ Τρίτωνι τρέφεσθαι”) and both girls practised combat skills, which resulted in a rivalry (“ἀμφοτέρας... ἀσκούσας τὰ κατὰ πόλεμον εἰς φιλονεικίαν ποτὲ προελθεῖν”). When Pallas was about to overpower Athene, Zeus intervened (3.144.4-145.1):

And when Pallas was about to land a blow, Zeus grew alarmed and placed his aegis in the way, causing Pallas to look upwards in fright and fall victim to a fatal wound from Athene.

μελλούσης δὲ πλήττειν τῆς Παλλάδος τὸν Δία φοβηθέντα τὴν αἰγίδα προτεῖναι, τὴν δὲ εὐλαβηθεῖσαν ἀναβλέψαι, καὶ οὕτως ὑπὸ τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς τρωθεῖσαν πεσεῖν.²⁰⁹

If not for the intervention of her father Zeus, Athene would have been outmanoeuvred by Pallas, and thus the daughter of Triton appears to be a better fighter than the young goddess of warfare.²¹⁰ Indeed, it takes the power of the paternal affection of the leader of the Greek Pantheon to keep Pallas in check. Komnene, having drawn a comparison between Gaita and Pallas, brings the imaginative world of Greek mythology to the battlefield at Dyrrakhion. The Duchess of Apulia is endowed with the ability to challenge the goddess of warfare and

Apollodorus. See Diller 1935, 296-313, for a history of the manuscript tradition of the *Bibliotheca*. See Van der Valk 1958, 100-68, for a study of its sources. Smith and Trzaskoma 2007 provide an accessible introduction (xxix-xli) and a plain translation. For other English translations, see Hard 1997 and its helpful bibliography (xxxi-xxxiv), Simpson 1976, or Aldrich 1975. Frazer 1921 provides an older-fashioned translation with a wealth of supplementary material. The *Bibliotheca* had an engaged readership in the Byzantine Empire. As noted in Diller 1935, 300, the ninth-century Byzantine scholar Photios I of Constantinople describes in his own *Bibliotheca* a *Bibliotheca* attributed to an Apollodorus which seems to be the extant text (see Henry 1962, 39-40, for the text of Photios' *Bibliotheca*). Reinsch and Kambylis 2001, vol. 2 pg. 262, attribute a few other passages in the *Alexiad* to the influence of Pseudo-Apollodorus (Orpheus, *Bibl.* 1.14.14-16: *Alexiad* Pr.4.1; Gorgons, 2.41.23: 3.2.4; Herakles and the Erymanthian boar, 2.83.14ff.: 1.9.6; Niobe, 3.47.20-4: 15.11.23). Much like his daughter Pallas, Triton is a slippery figure in Greek mythology. He is most commonly represented as part-fish and occasionally has monstrous connotations (Grant and Hazel 2002, s.v. "Triton").

²⁰⁹ Translation by Robin Hard (1997, 123-4). The *OCD* describes the aegis as a large bib often decorated with the face of a gorgon and fringed with snakes which brings victory to gods and fear to their enemies (s.v. "aegis," 2005). Wagner 1965, 148, follows Heyne 1803, 329-30, in rejecting sections 3.144 and 145 as interpolations. Frazer 1921, vol. II pg. 41 n.1, argues against Heyne and cites as evidence John Tzetzes, the twelfth-century Byzantine poet and grammarian, who quotes 3.144-5 in the *Scholia on Lycophron*, 355.21-28, after his own description of the Palladion (see Scheer 1958, 138, for the text). Van der Valk 1958, 142-3, argues that the passage on the origin of the Palladion is authentic due to the characteristic of the *Bibliotheca* to offer digressions. Aldrich 1975, 144, less convincingly notes that 3.144-5 deserve to be included because "they are the only source for this myth."

²¹⁰ The story ends on a remorseful note (3.145.1-9): Athene, despondent ("περίλυπον") at the thought of having killed her superior sparring partner by accident, makes a wooden image of Pallas ("ξόανον ἐκείνης ὁμοιον") and reveres it, and thus creates the Palladion ("καὶ περὶ μὲν τοῦ παλλαδίου ταῦτα λέγεται"). See Létoublon 2014, 143-61, for a discussion of Pallas as the mythological double of Athene. Cf. Buckler 1929, 200, who suggests that Komnene is making a distinction between the Pallas Athene qualities of the goddess, such as brandishing a spear and being warlike, and those other qualities of Athene which relate to her role as the goddess of wisdom and women's work. Hansen 2004, 126, also notes that Athene is referred to independently as Pallas. Eads 2005, 76, on a similar note, entertains the idea that Komnene could be referring to Pallas Athene as the goddess endowed with the epithet she earned for killing Pallas the giant (see Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.37.6-8) and thus argues that the comparison serves as a comment on Gaita's display of physical vigour.

perhaps strike the killing blow. Gaita, therefore, is characterised as a disciplined warrior and a significant military threat to the Byzantine army.

Komnene develops the description of Gaita on the battlefield from Pallas (“Παλλὰς ἄλλη”), the unfortunate but skilled playmate, to Athene herself (“κἄν μὴ Ἀθήνη”) in quick succession. At first glance, the effect of two comparisons suggests an upgrade of the perceived threat which Gaita constitutes to the Byzantine forces. Reading further into the passage, however, the image of Gaita as Athene, goddess of warfare, preventing her own troops from fleeing seems to function as a humorous inversion of a scene from Book Two of the *Iliad*. The heralds call out and the Achaean army gathers quickly (“τοὶ δ’ ἠγείροντο μάλ’ ὤκα”).²¹¹ “Bright-eyed Athene” (“γλαυκῶπις Ἀθήνη”) watches on.²¹² As they gather, Athene inspires the men for the war ahead (2.450-2):

... she encouraged the Achaean army
to go forth: she excited the strength in the heart of each man
to make war and to struggle on, unceasing.

... λαὸν Ἀχαιῶν
ὀτρύνουσ’ ἰέναι· ἐν δὲ σθένος ὤρσεν ἐκάστῳ
καρδίῃ ἄλληκτον πολεμίζειν ἠδὲ μάχεσθαι.²¹³

Athene provides battle-enhancing energy to supplement an already-organised army. Gaita, by comparison, has her work cut out for her. Rather than being “bright-eyed” Athene, Gaita glares “sharply” at her fleeing troops (“δριμὺ τούτοις ἐνατενίσασα”).²¹⁴ And instead of divinely exciting her troops for the battle, Gaita must glare, shout, and then gallop straight at them in order for their fighting spirit to return.²¹⁵ Furthermore, during the latter gesture Gaita wields an important symbol of Athene as the goddess of warfare. She takes up her large spear (“δόρυ μακρὸν ἐναγκαλισαμένη”) before charging at her own troops, and thus the parallel images of Athene in the *Iliad* silently spurring on the well-ordered Achaeans and

²¹¹ Hom. *Il.* 2.444. I use West 1998 as my text for Books 1-12 of the *Iliad* and West 2000 for Books 13-24. The Byzantine passion for the Homeric epics cannot be understated. Komnene, for one, quotes the Homeric epics with greater verbal accuracy than the Bible, according to Buckler (1929, 198). As Hunger 1969-70, 29, points out, children in the education system of the Byzantine Empire learned at a young age that “Homer” was “The Poet.” See also Browning 1975a, 15-33, on the influence of the Homeric epics in the Byzantine Empire.

²¹² Hom. *Il.* 2.446.

²¹³ The translation is my own.

²¹⁴ *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147).

²¹⁵ *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147): “[Gaita] glared at them sharply, and then she sent forth in the loudest voice a speech... But she saw them fleeing still, and she... hurled herself at full gallop against those taking flight... the men returned to their senses and summoned themselves back to fight again”; “δριμὺ τούτοις ἐνατενίσασα κατ’ αὐτῶν μεγίστην ἀφείσα φωνήν... ὡς δὲ ἔτι φεύγοντας τούτους ἐώρα... ὅλους ῥυτῆρας ἐνδοῦσα κατὰ τῶν φευγόντων ἵεται... ἐαυτῶν γεγονότες αὐθις πρὸς μάχην ἐαυτοὺς ἀνεκαλέσαντο.”

Gaita-as-Athene in the *Alexiad* challenging her own disarrayed men promote the interpretation that the organisation of the Norman army is a farce.²¹⁶ The army is turned around by the spear of Gaita rather than her commands, and their ultimate leader Robert Guiscard is nowhere to be seen. The effect of the comparison between Gaita and Athene thereby seems at first to glorify the Norman woman and depict her as the protector of a heroic band of warriors, like Athene in the *Iliad*.²¹⁷ As the scene plays out, however, the reader is left with the impression that not even a deity could help these troops, and if it were not for the full commitment of Gaita the army would have been routed completely.²¹⁸ The Normans go on to win this battle, owed in no small measure to the leadership of Gaita, but eventually they lose the war.

Another part of the passage further intensifies the turmoil and scope of the scene. Attempting to stop the fleeing troops, Gaita takes actions, “having let loose in a singular fashion in the loudest voice that Homeric expression” (“μεγίστην ἀφεῖσα φωνὴν μονοῦ τὸ ὀμηρικὸν ἐκεῖνο ἔπος”).²¹⁹ The speech questions the motive behind their flight and calls upon their resolve: “How far will you flee? Make a stand! Be men!” (“μέχρι πόσου φεύξεσθε; στήτε, ἄνδρες ἔστε”).²²⁰ And, as signalled by Komnene, the speech of Gaita shares linguistic features with speeches given by Agamemnon and Hector in the *Iliad*. A Trojan surge helped along by Ares meets a staunch Achaean battle line in Book Five of the *Iliad*. Agamemnon shouts commands to his troops to encourage them: “Oh friends, be men! And hearts, seize your courage!” (“ὦ φίλοι ἄνδρες ἔστε καὶ ἄλκιμον ἦτορ ἔλεσθε”).²²¹ The speeches of Agamemnon and Gaita share the exhortation directed at their troops to “be men” (“ἄνδρες ἔστε”), and the context of the battlefield. Before he returns to Troy in Book Six, Hector leaves the Trojans with a few words in much the same manner: “Be men, friends! And recall your rushing strength” (“ἄνδρες ἔστε φίλοι, μνήσασθε δὲ θούριδος ἀλκῆς”).²²²

²¹⁶ Eads 2005, 77. The spear of Athene is a common motif in art and appears at a few key points in the *Iliad*. In Book Five Athene joins Diomedes on his chariot and picks up her spear, “heavy, great, and sturdy” (“βριθὺ μέγα στιβαρόν”, 5.746). Athene is also attributed with the power to guide the flight of a warrior’s spear, as she does for Diomedes (5.856-7) and Achilles (22.270-7).

²¹⁷ Vilimonović 2018, 91.

²¹⁸ Buckley 2014, 73.

²¹⁹ *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147).

²²⁰ *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147).

²²¹ Hom. *Il.* 5.529.

²²² Hom. *Il.* 6.112. Homeric epics are very repetitive, as Clark 2004, 117-19, points out, so what is more significant than the fact that two generals on opposing sides of the battlefield speak the same lines in an oral epic is that the essential idea of masculinity as a requirement for martial success echoes throughout the *Iliad*. See also the Byzantine general Kantakouzenos at *Alexiad* 13.5.6, whose troops panic when they hear the Kelts are coming to besiege them at Mylos: “Kantakouzenos fought hard and made repeated charges into the crowd of frightened men. ‘Be men,’ he shouted, quoting the poet. ‘Recall the spirit and fury of war.’ He did not

Gaita, Agamemnon and Hector encourage their troops to “be men” and thus a clear link emerges between the passages. The scene is thus embellished with the echoes of paradigmatic and courageous commanders of war.²²³ The battlefield at Dyrrakhion is now epic in its proportions and, as the general shouting the Homeric speech, the characterisation of Gaita takes on the heroic glow of a commander on the plain of the Scamander. Gaita is depicted as a paradigm of masculine bravery and competency in battle, and thus in defiance of traditional gender roles.²²⁴ The troops of Hector and Agamemnon, however, were facing the right way and listened to their commander, and thus Komnene’s point that the speech of Gaita was “like one of Homer in her own dialect” is driven home.²²⁵ If only Gaita had been yelling in Greek at Byzantine men, maybe her words would have had the desired effect.

There is another speech from a Homeric epic which possesses a link to the words of Gaita. In the *Odyssey*, Nausicaa orders her slaves not to run away from Odysseus: “My maids, stop! Where do you flee when you see a man?” (“στῆτέ μοι ἀμφίπολοι· πόσε φεύγετε φῶτα ἰδοῦσαι;”)²²⁶ The equivalence lies in the context of one brave party calling to a fleeing group to stop and the second-person plural imperative form of *histēmi*. Komnene places this imperative in Gaita’s mouth at 4.6.5, and though “στῆτε” occurs with some frequency in the extant corpus of Greek literature, when one takes into consideration that Komnene has tagged the speech as “that Homeric expression” (“μονονοῦ τὸ ὁμηρικὸν ἐκεῖνο ἔπος”) it is impossible to ignore the similarity of the context and the fact that Nausicaa is the only character in Homeric epic to say “στῆτε.”²²⁷ The implication of the *Odyssey* parallel is that the Norman men fleeing the Byzantine forces are the young slave women running from the strange sight of brine-encrusted and naked Odysseus, and Gaita, in the role of Nausicaa, is the one commanding them to stop. Several Homeric scholars note that Nausicaa stands out among her group of girls for her nobility and courage.²²⁸ Gaita too stands out at *Alexiad* 4.6.5 for the same reasons, while the Norman troops prove to be more cowardly and senseless than scared slave women. The attendants of Nausicaa obey the commands of their

persuade [them]”; “πολλὰ γοῦν ὁ Καντακουζηνὸς ἀγωνισάμενος καὶ πολλὰς ἰππασίας κατὰ τῶν ἐκδειματωθέντων ποιήσας ‘άνερες ἐστέ’, φωνῶν κατὰ τὸν ποιητὴν, ‘μνήσθητε θούριδος ἀλκῆς’, ὡς οὐκ ἔπειθεν” (R-K 399, F 371, S 410).

²²³ See Hunger 1969-70, 29, on quotations from classical authors working to strengthen the impact of the text on the reader.

²²⁴ Skinner 2000, 623.

²²⁵ *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147).

²²⁶ Hom. *Od.* 6.199. I use West 2017 as my text for the *Odyssey*.

²²⁷ *Alexiad* 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147). To give an idea of the frequency of the word, the imperative “στῆτε” occurs 157 times in the *TLG*.

²²⁸ De Jong 2004, 159; Snider 1922, 167-8.

mistress.²²⁹ The Norman troops, on the other hand, ignore Gaita and keep running. In the context of the *Alexiad*, the status of the *Odyssey* as a source text for this speech emphasises the impression of the Norman army as effeminate and unorganised and therefore inferior to their Byzantine adversaries.²³⁰ The Homeric grandeur of Gaita standing and speaking like Nausicaa, Agamemnon or Hector is undercut by the cowardly attitude of the Norman men who will not return to the battle until being mowed down by the Duchess of Apulia presents itself as the only alternative option.²³¹ Komnene thus seems to suggest that it takes death at the hands of a woman to make the Norman men fight, a dishonourable end for any Christian man, and the characterisation of Gaita on the battlefield should put no doubt in the mind of the reader that she would kill her own men to achieve victory.

To conclude this segment of the chapter, the effect of intertextuality upon the characterisation of Gaita of Salerno is complex. The comparisons to Pallas and Athene introduce the image of Gaita as a woman-warrior evocative of a mythological past and a suitable candidate for the role of protector of the army.²³² When she speaks, Gaita is linked at first to Nausicaa, challenging her maid servants, and then the war generals encouraging their troops. The reader is thereby confronted with a blend of Homeric voices, and both comparisons contain a degree of the subversion of traditional gender roles. The effect of attributing Gaita with the speech of a princess and then a war general highlights her status and bravery while emasculating the Norman army, who seem to have more in common with slave girls than they do with the Achaean or Trojan armies.²³³ Thus Gaita, it can be argued, enacts masculinity on the phallogocentric domain of the battlefield in front of men with no self-control in a state of *pathos*, in other words behaving as women were expected to.²³⁴ By facing the enemy and standing up to her men instead of joining their flight the character of Gaita acts as a positive role model for feminine courage. Penelope Buckley, in a similar vein, states that Gaita is an example of “commitment to action whether right or wrong,” taking into consideration the Byzantine perspective that the Norman campaign was an

²²⁹ Hom. *Od.* 6.211: “...and they came to a standstill and urged one another...”, “αἱ δ’ ἔσταν τε καὶ ἀλλήλησι κέλευσαν...”

²³⁰ Skinner 2000, 623; McLaughlin 1990, 194.

²³¹ Skinner 2000, 623. Skinner also notes that the goad to fight is large in impact because Gaita was a Lombard princess before she became a Norman duchess, and thus some form of rivalry between the Italian localities is also at play.

²³² Vilimonović 2018, 91.

²³³ Buckler 1929, 199: “Certainly the more forcibly does [Komnene] wish to portray valour, the more Homeric she becomes.” See Brown 2011, 164, on the less-heroic version of Gaita at the Battle of Dyrrakhion depicted in William of Apulia’s *GRW* at 4.425-31.

²³⁴ Vilimonović 2018, 91. Of all the goddesses in the Pantheon to be likened to, Komnene seems to have chosen the one with the most masculine qualities for her description of Gaita. See Deacy 2008, 31, on Athena’s affiliation with the male and her confounding of gender norms.

unjustifiable barbarian act.²³⁵ An implication of the characterisation of Gaita is that, as the person in charge of the campaign, Robert Guiscard is at fault for failing to discipline his troops and his wife is forced to make up for his failures by stepping into a role “more acceptable for a man.”²³⁶ It should not escape notice that the root verb of the participle which Komnene uses to describe Gaita taking up her spear at the Battle of Dyrrakhion (“δόρυ μακρὸν ἐναγκαλισαμένη”) is the same as that which she uses to describe Guiscard taking Gaita into his arms at Otranto (“ἐνηγκαλίσσατο ταύτην”).²³⁷ Komnene depicts the Norman Duke and Duchess in a love triangle, and when Guiscard fails to lead his army properly Gaita turns to her spear for solace and support. Komnene adorns Gaita with traditionally masculine qualities such as bravery and skill in the art of warfare and intensifies the depiction through references to classical texts and myths which include women acting appropriately in positions of power. Gaita is in control of herself, of armies, and to some degree of Robert Guiscard.²³⁸ The characterisation of Gaita as a woman who defies gendered roles and threatens men with her spear is therefore a dramatic result of the complete failure of masculinity in the surrounding area and concomitantly evidence of the inferiority of the Normans.

A Certain Woman

The Italo-Norman noblewoman Emma of Hauteville features briefly in the *Alexiad* and causes a major upset. She enters the narrative as the unnamed defender of Otranto and her characterisation is defined by her race and the manner in which she outmanoeuvres a Byzantine admiral. As she is introduced to the reader as a member of the notorious Hauteville family, Komnene seems to suggest that the character of this woman should be understood as similar to that of her male relatives. In Book Twelve, Alexios sends Isaac Kontostephanos to Dyrrakhion “with the threat that his eyes would be gouged out” if he failed to arrive there before the Norman leader Bohemond did (“ἐπαπειλησάμενος τὴν τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκκοπήν”).²³⁹ Kontostephanos, however, was ignorant of the crossing point between Italy and Greece which Bohemond was likely to use so he overlooked his

²³⁵ Buckley 2014, 73.

²³⁶ Eads 2005, 77.

²³⁷ *Alexiad* 1.15.1 (R-K 48, F 43, S 66); 4.6.5 (R-K 133-4, F 121, S 147).

²³⁸ Hill 2000, 57.

²³⁹ *Alexiad* 12.8.1 (R-K 378, F 351, S 388). The threat, which perhaps seems uncharacteristic of Emperor Alexios, will make sense in due course. Isaac Kontostephanos is remembered for his lack of success as a commander (*ODB* s.v. “Kontostephanos,” 1991). See *Alexiad* 13.7.2 (R-K 403, F 375, S 414) for the report of Landulph, who writes to Emperor Alexios accusing Kontostephanos of neglect in his role as *thalassokrator* or “ruler of the sea.” The year is approximately 1107 at this point in the narrative.

orders and sailed to Otranto on the coast of Lombardy, a region of Italy, where he anchored his ships and began to attack, only to meet with resistance in the form of a fast-thinking woman.²⁴⁰ Komnene professes ignorance as to the name of this Italo-Norman bulwark:

A certain woman defended this city, the mother, so it was said, of Tancred, though whether she was sister to the much discussed Bohemond or not, I cannot resolve: for I do not know exactly if Tancred was connected to Bohemond on the father's or the mother's side of the family.

ταύτην τὴν πόλιν γυνή τις ἐφρούρει, μήτηρ, ὡς ἐλέγετο, τοῦ Ταγγρέ, εἴτε ἀδελφὴ τοῦ ἐν πολλοῖς ἤδη ῥηθέντος Βαϊμόντου εἴτε καὶ μή, συνιδεῖν οὐκ ἔχω· οὐ γὰρ οἶδα σαφῶς εἰ πατρόθεν ἢ μητρόθεν τὴν πρὸς τὸν Βαϊμόντον ὁ Ταγγρὲ συγγένειαν ἐκέκτητο.²⁴¹

Although she cannot define where this woman fits into the family tree, Komnene can connect her to two of her notorious relatives. Tancred, her son, was an Italo-Norman general who took part in the First Crusade and went on to rule Antioch.²⁴² Bohemond, whom Komnene connects to the woman with less confidence, proved to be a greater Norman antagonist to the Byzantines than Robert Guiscard.²⁴³ On a historical note, sources seem to agree that the woman defending Otranto is therefore Emma of Hauteville.²⁴⁴ And regarding the narrative of the *Alexiad*, Komnene foreshadows that Kontostephanos is in trouble by introducing Emma through her relatives. The personal bias of the author is such that the

²⁴⁰ *Alexiad* 12.8.2 (R-K 378, F 351, S 389).

²⁴¹ *Alexiad* 12.8.2 (R-K 378, F 351, S 389). The translation is my own.

²⁴² Buckler 1929, 477 n.2, sums him up well: "Insolence is Tancred's chief characteristic." The most informative work on Tancred is still the PhD thesis of Robert Lawrence Nicholson, 1940. The *ODB* entry for Tancred, most of the details of which are drawn from the *Alexiad*, gives the years ca. 1075-ca. 1112 for his lifetime (s.v. "Tancred," 1991). For a Norman source on the crusade campaign of Tancred, see the *Gesta Tancredi* by Ralph of Caen (see Bachrach and Bachrach 2016, 19-174, for the text).

²⁴³ Bohemond lived between ca. 1050-1109 and irritated Alexios for much of his lifetime (*ODB* s.v. "Bohemond," 1991). For a concise biography of Bohemond see the work of Ralph Bailey Yewdale, 1924. See Albu 2000, 157-168, on Komnene's depiction of Bohemond and his love for trickery in the *Alexiad* and Buckler 1929, 469-78, for a character sketch. As with Tancred, there is little further reading.

²⁴⁴ Tracing women in the family tree of the Hauteville is difficult due to a lack of sources for their lives. The historical sources agree that Tancred is the son of Emma of Hauteville and Odo the Good Marquis, but there is disagreement as to whether Emma was the daughter of Robert Guiscard and Gaita or Guiscard and his first wife, Alberada, whom Guiscard repudiated on the grounds of consanguinity, as reported in the *GRW* (2.416-23). The status of Bohemond as a child of this first marriage is undisputed, but sources conflict concerning Emma. Whomever is her mother, either Gaita or Alberada, Emma and Bohemond have the same father and so Tancred is the nephew of Bohemond. See Nicholson 1940, 1-19, for a discussion of the sources for the birthdate and parentage of Tancred and the estimated age of Emma at the time of her marriage. Some sources even report that Emma was a sister to Robert Guiscard, and therefore that Tancred was the cousin of Bohemond (see, for example, the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Ordericus Vitalis, 1854, vol. III pg. 82 n.6). Tancred is also occasionally confused with his great-grandfather Tancred of Hauteville. Loud 1991, 46, notes that Komnene's discussion of the Normans does contain mistakes, but in this case her speculation was correct, and Tancred was indeed Bohemond's nephew on the maternal side. Going forward, I will refer to the defender of Otranto as Emma for simplicity.

Normans are frequently defined in the text as cunning and fond of ruses.²⁴⁵ Thus, the narrator sets up the expectation that the defender of Otranto will have the same propensity for deceit as her male relatives and play the part of a stereotypically treacherous Norman. And unfortunately for the Byzantines, Kontostephanos has already been singled out as more of a navel gazer than a naval commander.

A significant aspect of the depiction of Emma is the intelligence and bravery she displays during the Byzantine attack. While a woman holding a position of power without a man acting as a co-ruler would consist of an incursion upon traditional gender norms in medieval Europe, Komnene portrays Emma as a competent leader in an emergency with the complete support of her subjects. Kontostephanos, by contrast, is made to look like a fool and unfit for his office. Having already sent a message to one of her sons asking for back-up, Emma tricks Kontostephanos into thinking she is surrendering Otranto. Emma manipulates the situation “to suspend the plot of Kontostephanos” to give her son enough time to come to her aid (“ἀπαιωροῦσα τὸν τοῦ Κοντοστεφάνου λογισμόν”).²⁴⁶ She orders her people to play along so that the Byzantine fleet think they have captured the town (12.8.3):

the fleet was already entirely confident, as if the city were already in their grasp, and all were acclaiming the emperor, and she... commanded her own people within the city to do this too. At the same time, having sent ambassadors to Kontostephanos, she agreed to the dominion of the emperor and promised to make a peace treaty with him...

τοῦ δὲ ναυτικοῦ παντὸς θαρσήσαντος ἤδη, ὡς ἐν χερσὶ τὴν πόλιν ἔχοντος, καὶ τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως εὐφημίαν ποιουμένων ἀπάντων, καὶ αὐτὴ... τοῦτο παρεκελεύετο ποιεῖν καὶ τοὺς ἐντός. ἅμα δὲ καὶ πρὸς τὸν Κοντοστεφάνον πρέσβεις ἀποστείλασα, δουλείαν ὁμολόγει τῷ αὐτοκράτορι καὶ εἰρηνικὰς μετ’ αὐτοῦ σπονδὰς ὑπισχεῖτο ποιήσασθαι...²⁴⁷

Emma continues to delay Kontostephanos with “these words and false promises” (“τοιούτοις λόγοις καὶ ἐπαγγελίαις ψευδέσι”).²⁴⁸ For this scheme, Komnene describes the defender of Otranto as “the logical and level-headed woman” (“γυνὴ φρενήρης... καὶ σταθηρὰ τὴν

²⁴⁵ See Albu 2000, 160-3, on deceit as an “essentially Norman trait.” Similarly, the idea of women as naturally inclined towards being deceitful due to the actions of Eve is a frequent one in Byzantine literature, so by identifying the defender of Otranto by her gender Komnene perhaps also leans into a trope of negative feminine behaviour. See Galatariotou 1985, 61, on male-authored Byzantine texts and the idea that all women are marked by Eve’s deceit and therefore predisposed to evil and untrustworthiness.

²⁴⁶ *Alexiad* 12.8.3 (R-K 379, F 352, S 389).

²⁴⁷ *Alexiad* 12.8.3 (R-K 378-9, F 351-2, S 389). The translation is my own.

²⁴⁸ *Alexiad* 12.8.4 (R-K 379, F 352, S 389).

γνώμην”) and thus links her to an exclusive group of characters in the *Alexiad* who are also labelled in such a manner, including Emperor Alexios himself.²⁴⁹ Komnene goes on to defend her father for using deception as a tactic to win military victories at a later point in the narrative, thus providing more support for the idea that the actions of Emma constitute effective military leadership in the eyes of the authorial persona.²⁵⁰ What is more, she describes the defender of Otranto as “that soldier-woman” (“ἡ στρατιῶτις ἐκείνη γυνή”), thereby fully acknowledging the martial reasoning behind Emma’s reaction and emphasising the tension inherent in her role with regard to normative gendered behaviour.²⁵¹ Emma of Hauteville fools a Byzantine admiral and saves her city, and therefore earns recognition from the author for her convincing performance of surrender.²⁵² As Emma is never named, these marks of praise become her identifying features in the text.

***Alexiad* 12.8.3: tragic actors**

The intertextual possibilities in the characterisation of Emma are not as numerous as those of Gaita, but still touch upon similar themes. Komnene heightens the sense of drama in the passage on the “capture” of Otranto and introduces an element of gender play with the same gesture. Emma of Hauteville lies to Kontostephanos about her intention to make a peace treaty to lull him into a false sense of security (12.8.3):

... so that somewhere in the midst her son might take over and then she could drop the deception, exactly as they say of the tragic actors, and lay claim to combat.

²⁴⁹ *Alexiad* 12.8.3 (R-K 378, F 351, S 389). In the order of occurrence in the narrative, Komnene uses the adjective “φρενήρης” meaning “logical” or “sound of mind” to describe: Robert Guiscard for the manner in which he flattered and bribed his adversaries (1.12.1, R-K 39, F 34, S 57); the mind of Anna Dalassene in reference to the decision of Alexios to yield governance of the empire to her (3.6.2, R-K 100, F 92, S 116); Alexios calmly dodging spears in battle (4.6.8, R-K 135, F 123, S 148); the noble ambassadors sent to Bohemond by Alexios for the successful mission of ratifying the Treaty of Devol (13.9.1, R-K 408, F 379, S 418); the Byzantine intellectual Eumathios Philokales and his quick-thinking during a siege despite any military training (14.1.6, R-K 426, F 399, S 437). Likewise, the phrase “σταθηρὰ τὴν γνώμην”, which translates literally as “firm of judgement”, occurs at one other place in the *Alexiad* at 9.4.5 and describes the troops of John Komnenos, the nephew of the emperor, who quickly leap to his defence during a night raid upon their camp and save his life (R-K 267, F 245, S 277). As such, both terms of description have admirable connotations in the text.

²⁵⁰ *Alexiad* 13.4.3 (R-K 395, F 367, S 405): “As we know full well, a general’s supreme task is to win, not merely by force of arms, but also by relying on treaties, and there is another way – sometimes, in the right circumstances, an enemy can be beaten by fraud”; “καὶ τοῦτο γὰρ στρατηγῶν ἰδιαίτατον, ὅσαπερ ἴσμεν, μὴ μετὰ ξιφῶν καὶ μάχης μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς σπονδὰς τρεπομένων καὶ ἄλλως ἔστιν οὗ ῥαδιουργούντων τὸν ἐχθρὸν καταγωνίζεσθαι, ὀπηνίκα καὶ τοιοῦτου καιρὸς παρῆ.”

²⁵¹ *Alexiad* 12.8.4 (R-K 379, F 352, S 389). See McLaughlin 1990, 196-7, on the dangers of overlooking “military preparedness” in the female population of medieval Europe in texts. It is not clear as to whether Emma joined in on the hostilities when her son arrived, but her stratagem enabled her son’s victory over Kontostephanos.

²⁵² Albu 2000, 163; Reinsch 2000, 95.

εἶ που ἐν τῷ μεταξύ καταλάβοι ὁ ταύτης υἱὸς καὶ τηνικαῦτα τὴν σκηνήν,
καθάπερ τοὺς τραγικούς φασι, ῥίψασα μάχης ἀνθέξειτο.²⁵³

The source text for this passage is not a play, but the institution of Greek tragedy and its practices.²⁵⁴ The *skēnē* is the stage building in front of which the action of the play takes place, and the same word can also possess the metaphoric meaning of “a deception” or the “craft” of the tragedian.²⁵⁵ The adjective *tragikos* generally means “of tragedy” or “tragic.”²⁵⁶ The expression used by Komnene thereby seems to encapsulate the idea of actors ceasing to act as characters and the tragedy coming to an end. To map the system of discourse onto this passage from the *Alexiad*, Otranto is the stage, Emma’s intention to surrender is the deception, and, so the logic goes, Emma is the traditionally male tragic actor performing a character.²⁵⁷ Having played the part of a submissive woman and thus stayed within gendered expectations of behaviour, Emma lulls Kontostephanos into a false sense of victory. Once her son arrives, Komnene implies, Emma drops the act and returns to her real self. The actor stops playing the part of the woman; Emma returns to openly participating in masculine-coded behaviour, like warfare, because she no longer needs to convince Kontostephanos that he is in control of the situation while she is helpless.²⁵⁸ The success of her ruse is a testament to both her intelligence and bravery, and the naivety of Kontostephanos. The effect of intertextuality in the characterisation of Emma, therefore, suggests that Komnene portrays her as using expectations of traditional feminine behaviour to gain the advantage until the right time comes to subvert them in order to seal the victory.²⁵⁹

Before this chapter reaches its conclusion, a brief comparison of the portraits of Gaita and Emma provides some more clues to understanding the rhetorical purpose of their presence in the *Alexiad*. Obvious criticism is absent from both depictions of the Italo-Norman women, and Komnene seems ambivalent as to whether to hold them to the same standards of decorous and modest behaviour which she herself professes to observe. Both

²⁵³ *Alexiad* 12.8.3 (R-K 378, F 352, S 389). The translation is my own.

²⁵⁴ See Edmunds 2001, 143-7, for the ways in which the language specific to an institution, an organization, or a customary social practice (otherwise known as a system of discourse) can be a “quotation” or source text. See Symes 2016, 98-130, for the important part played by the Greek East in the transmission of classical drama and the popularity of Attic playwrights in Byzantine education.

²⁵⁵ Rabinowitz 2008, 21.; LSJ s.v. “σκηνή”; *Suda*, sigma 569. See the *Suda*, tau 891, for the idea that the “τέχνη” or craft of the tragedian is also called their “stage.”

²⁵⁶ LSJ s.v. “τραγικός.”

²⁵⁷ See Rabinowitz 2008, 27, on the convention of only men acting in Greek theatre.

²⁵⁸ See McLaughlin 1990, 194, on warfare as “the quintessential masculine activity” during the European middle ages.

²⁵⁹ In this way, both Anna Dalassene and Emma of Hauteville appear to use feminine-coded performances of emotion to manipulate others. See Chapter 4, Book Two on Dalassene’s performance in Hagia Sophia.

Gaita and Emma appear to have self-control as they are not depicted in states of *pathos* and they can lead others through predicaments, and so they look “competent”, and thus Barbara Hill argued that Komnene was “prepared to attribute virtue” to women other “than those of her own family.”²⁶⁰ Gaita, as the only woman in the *Alexiad* to openly engage in martial activity, is something of an anomaly, but she does appear to act appropriately as a wife. Likewise, the impact of Emma’s subversion of traditional gendered behaviour is no doubt softened by the fact that she leads Otranto through an emergency situation and yields power to her son as soon as he returns.²⁶¹ Emma’s position of power is thus only temporary and, unlike Gaita, her main means of being an adversary to the Byzantines is through the appropriately Norman manner of theatrical beguilement rather than physical might. Therefore, the Italo-Norman women are still presented as fulfilling traditional gendered roles within the family unit, and their masculine-coded behaviour only surfaces when the men they are deferential to are absent. Komnene, as a woman-author claiming masculine discourse, thus affords the enemies of her father’s empire the same capability to display masculine virtues as she grants Anna Dalassene, her grandmother, and the positive associations of a woman curating self-control and earning these virtues carry through into the depictions of Gaita and Emma. If the characterisations of Gaita and Emma are intended to be barbed at all, the victims would appear to be Robert Guiscard and his Norman army, or the Byzantine general Kontostephanos, for their failures to show self-control and act in manner that upholds masculine authority.

²⁶⁰ Hill 2000, 58.

²⁶¹ *Alexiad* 12.8.4 (R-K 379, F 352, S 389).

Conclusion: Leading Ladies

Gaita of Salerno and Emma of Hauteville are depicted as capable, if temporary, leaders in the narrative, and together they leave the impression that Komnene was prepared to look beyond her own personal bias and attribute agency and self-control to them in order to show up both Norman and Byzantine men for their failures to act in a masculine manner. Gaita is identified as a political adviser, military general and devoted wife who steps into a masculine role in order to turn the tide of battle in her husband's favour, and in doing so she is glamourized in the narrative through intertextual links to source texts at the expense of her army, who appear scared and thus effeminate by contrast. Emma plays the part of a cunning Norman, and she too reveals the inadequacies of man, but this time the target is a Byzantine general. Komnene commends her for her intelligence and depicts her performing the role of submissive woman in order to gain a military advantage. However, Emma is only a temporary leader and male authority is soon restored. An intertextual approach to the characterisation of the Italo-Norman women of the *Alexiad* thereby reveals that the traditional gendered hierarchy of roles is only disrupted when a male leader in possession of appropriate masculinity is absent, and so Gaita and Emma do hold positions of power, but not permanent ones. The rhetorical purpose of their performance of subversive gendered behaviour thus seems to be in service of the Byzantine ideology that both men and women had to actively curate their self-control in order to seem virtuous.

Chapter 6: Anna Komnene

Leonora Neville in 2019 argued that the depiction of emotion in literary texts has an agenda.²⁶² Komnene deliberately presents herself as mournful and piteous in several passages in the *Alexiad* in order to act “like a natural woman,” as Byzantine society would expect, and therefore to elicit a favourable emotional response from her readership.²⁶³ The action of drying her eyes after an outburst of grief is then an act of emotional control, designed to enhance the reader’s trust in the inherently transgressive authorial persona of Komnene who dares to participate in the masculine tradition of Greek classicizing historiography.²⁶⁴ Plenty of evidence exists to support Neville’s thesis.²⁶⁵ And, there is more than one emotion available to the ideal, “natural,” Byzantine woman. This chapter analyses two passages in the *Alexiad*, 1.13.3 and 15.9.1, where the authorial persona claims to feel a sense of modesty or shame (*aidōs*), to consider the effect this performance of emotion was intended to have on the audience, thereby testing Neville’s thesis in a different emotional context. Then, this chapter will discuss the intertextual possibilities introduced by the quotation of Sappho fragment 137 V in the context of the intellectual activity of the time, its transmission, the role of commentaries of philosophic texts concerning the speakers in the poem and some of its interpretations in order to add to the understanding of Komnene’s emotional authorial persona. The chapter ends with a discussion of “double consciousness” in order to consider the commitment of Anna Komnene to the contemplation of her culture’s definitions of appropriate feminine behaviour.

Something Most Monstrous

The emotional state of feeling *aidōs* (shame) appears in the narrative when the task of writing history seems to require the inclusion of details which the gendered authorial persona of Komnene considers shameful to repeat. *Aidōs*, an emotion in Greek which governs the ideas of both shame and embarrassment, functions in the following passages as an inhibitory

²⁶² Neville 2019a, 65-92.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 82. This argument fits into Neville’s larger project, as set out in Neville 2016, 153-74, of challenging the recurrent idea in scholarship that Anna Komnene was a power-hungry conspirator who wrote the *Alexiad* to voice her discontent after failing to usurp her brother Emperor John II Komnenos in 1118. Such scholarship interprets the emotions depicted in the text as evidence of Komnene’s passionate and vengeful feelings towards her brother. I think Neville (2019a, 81) is right in judging this thread of scholarship “a modern version of the ancient assumption that women cannot control their feelings.”

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁶⁵ See the following passages for evidence which supports Neville’s 2019a argument: *Alexiad Pr.4.1*, where Komnene remembers the death of her husband Nikephoros Bryennios (R-K 9, F 6, S 20); 1.12.3, recalling her first betrothed Constantine Doukas (R-K 40, F 35, S 58); 15.5.4, retelling the death of her brother Andronikos (R-K 475-6, F 445, S 485); 15.11.21, reflecting on the death of her father (R-K 503-4, F 468, S 509-10); and 15.11.22, remembering the death of her mother (R-K 504-5, F 472, S 514).

emotion which the authorial persona feels as she pictures herself losing honour for prospective non-feminine activity.²⁶⁶ For example, in Book One Komnene describes how the Norman adventurer Robert Guiscard came to threaten the Byzantine Empire. Guiscard garnered power from alliances with rulers in the western Mediterranean and became an attractive prospective ally to the Pope of Rome. The Roman Pope Gregory VII, Komnene relates, wanted an alliance with Guiscard because of a quarrel with King Henry IV of Germany.²⁶⁷ The pope accused Henry IV of simony and of appointing unworthy men to the office of archbishop. Henry accused the pope of usurpation.²⁶⁸ Komnene feels a sense of *aidōs* as she describes the reaction of the pope:

Then, hearing these words, the pope immediately raged at the envoys and tortured them inhumanly first, before he cropped their hair and cut off their beards, the former with scissors and their beards with a razor, and then having done in addition something most monstrous, surpassing barbarian violence, he discharged them. I would speak of that violence, if womanly and imperial shame did not prevent me; for what was done on his behalf was not only unworthy of a high priest, but of any man conferring upon himself the name of a Christian. I also detest the devising of the barbarian, not just the deed itself, since both the pen that writes and paper would be defiled, if I were to expound the deed in detail. But also as proof of barbaric violence and that flowing time produces the characters of men manifoldly disposed to evil and all daring, it will suffice that we are not able to endure to indicate or explain even a small part of this thing that he did.

τούτων οὖν ἀκούσας ὁ πάπας τῶν λόγων κατὰ τῶν πρέσβειων εὐθὺς ἐμεμήνει καὶ αἰκισάμενος πρότερον ἀπανθρώπως, εἶτα καὶ κείρας τὰς κεφαλὰς καὶ ἐπικείρας τοὺς πώγωνας, τὰς μὲν ψαλίσι, ξυρῶ δὲ τοὺς πώγωνας, καὶ ἄλλο τι προσεξεργασάμενος ἀτοπώτατον καὶ βαρβαρικὴν ὕβριν ὑπερελαῦνον ἀφήκεν. εἶπον ἂν καὶ τὴν ὕβριν, εἰ μὴ με καὶ γυναικεία καὶ βασιλικὴ ἐπεῖχεν αἰδῶς· ἐκεῖνο γὰρ οὐχ' ὅπως ἀνάξιον ἀρχιερέως τὸ παρ' ἐκείνουπραχθέν, ἀλλ' οὐδ' ὅλως ἀνθρώπου χριστιανικὸν ἐπιφερομένου καὶ τοῦνομα. ἐβδελυξάμην καὶ τὸ ἐνθύμημα τοῦ βαρβάρου, μήτοιγε τοῦργον, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὸν γραφέα κάλαμον καὶ τὸν χάρτην ἐμόλυνα ἂν, εἰ τὸ πραχθέν κατὰ μέρος διεξήειν. ἀλλ' εἰς παράστασιν καὶ βαρβαρικῆς ὕβρεως καὶ ὅτι ὁ χρόνος ρέων ἦθη ἀνδρῶν παντοδαπὰ πρὸς κακίαν ἀναφύει καὶ πάντολμα, ἀρκέσει αὐτὸ τοῦτο τὸ μὴδὲ μικρὸν τι τοῦ πραχθέντος ἀνασχέσθαι ἡμᾶς παρεμφῆναι ἢ διηγῆσασθαι.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ See Cairns 1993, 13, for the inhibitory effect of *aidōs*.

²⁶⁷ *Alexiad* 1.13.1 (R-K 43, F 38, S 61).

²⁶⁸ See Henderson 1892, 372-3, for an English translation of the letter Henry IV sent to Pope Gregory VII, and Blumenthal 1988, 113-34, for a discussion of the Investiture Controversy, a small part of which is narrated in the following passage.

²⁶⁹ *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 43-4, F 39-9, S 62). The translation is my own.

The pope has done something “most monstrous” (“ἀτοπώτατον”), an out of place action of superlative status which exceeds the outrageous behaviour thought possible of those outside the Byzantine Empire (“βαρβαρικὴν ὕβριν ὑπερελαῦνον”).²⁷⁰ The sense of shame and modesty (“αἰδώς”) which comes with being a woman and a princess (“καὶ γυναικεία καὶ βασιλική”) prevents Komnene from telling the reader exactly what the violent deed (“τὴν ὕβριν”) entailed, making it clear that the behavioural expectations held by the audience for the gender and class of the authorial persona are being considered in the telling of the narrative. The observance of social customs is highlighted again when she judges the behaviour of the pope as not fit for his station (“ἀνάξιον ἀρχιερέως”) or his religion. As well as her feeling of *aidōs*, Komnene expresses her loathing for the logic of the “barbarian” (“τὸ ἐνθύμημα τοῦ βαρβάρου”), by which she means Pope Gregory VII, and what he did to the envoys. To describe the deed in detail would result in the defilement (“ἐμόλυνα”) of the historian’s pen and paper. The final statement is a doubling-down of the authorial persona’s moral position. The fact that Komnene (now in the first person plural, “ἡμᾶς”) cannot bear to suggest or explain (“παρεμφῆναι ἢ διηγήσασθαι”) in any way what the pope did to the envoys will be proof (“παράστασιν”) that his cruelty culminated in an act of unfamiliar violence (“βαρβαρικῆς ὕβρεως”) and that men inclined towards all sorts of evils and capable of any deed (“παντοδαπὰ πρὸς κακίαν... καὶ πάντολμα”) exist. The episode ends with Guiscard avoiding the Roman and German envoys and therefore any responsibility for fighting for either side of the disagreement.

Evidence for the agenda of the depiction of emotion in the *Alexiad* is detectable at several points in this passage. Anna Komnene depicts her authorial persona as deferential to her sense of “womanly and imperial shame” (“γυναικεία καὶ βασιλική... αἰδώς”).²⁷¹ This shame prevents her (“ἐπέιχεν”) from defining the act of violence inflicted on the envoys by Pope Gregory VII.²⁷² The verb of defilement, *molunō* (“I defile, stain, sully”), is suggestive of sexual activity and within the semantic field of pollution and sexual impropriety in this Byzantine context.²⁷³ Thus, the verb links the act of narrating an immodest deed with sexual

²⁷⁰ Secondary sources avoid giving this particular act of “ὕβρις” a name.

²⁷¹ *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 43-4, F 39-9, S 62).

²⁷² *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 43-4, F 39-9, S 62).

²⁷³ The *Suda* entry for *molunō* is: “Μολύνω· αἰτιατικῆ”; “*molunō*: used with an accusative” (*mu* 1210). Relevant entries in the *Suda* featuring verb forms of *molunō* are as follows, as translated by me: “Ἡλισγημένος: μεμιασμένος, μεμολυσμένος, ἠρτυμένος”, “*Ēlisgēmenos*: stained, defiled, prepared” (*eta* 246); “Λεσβίσαι: μολῶναι τὸ στόμα”, “*Lesbisai*: to defile the mouth” (*lambda* 306); “Μιαινεται: μολύνεται. καὶ Μιαίνω· αἰτιατικῆ”, “*Miainetai*: [he/she/it] is polluted. Also ‘I defile’ used with an accusative” (*mu* 1038); “Φορόνω: μολύνω”, “*Phorunō*: I defile” (*phi* 621); “Χραίνειν· αἰτιατικῆ. μιαίνειν, μολύνειν, ῥυποῦν”, “*Chrainein*: used with an accusative. To stain, to defile, to dirty” (*chi* 452). Modern editors also connect *molunō* with “Λύματα:

immodesty, which creates a stronger impetus for the authorial persona to avoid explaining the deed and further intensifies the impression that the actions of the pope are immodest, scandalising and sexual.²⁷⁴ Modesty was a prized virtue for Byzantine women.²⁷⁵ Furthermore, Anna Komnene’s use of the adjective “βασιλικός” (“imperial, of or belonging to a king”) reminds the reader of the link between author and subject and thus recalls the fact that Komnene is the daughter of Emperor Alexios I and therefore her conduct is linked to his reputation.²⁷⁶ The honour of the man under whose authority a woman falls is vulnerable through her because of the patriarchal social structures of Byzantium, and so a good and virtuous woman uses her sense of *aidōs* and controls her actions in order to uphold the “natural” order and assist men in maintaining masculine authority.²⁷⁷ Thus, Komnene presents her authorial persona as a modest woman and a well-mannered princess ever-conscious of how her actions may reflect upon the honour of her father in order to show the reader she is a good woman capable of assuming the deferential position expected of her gender. The performance of the emotion of *aidōs*, therefore, encourages the reader to both believe the woman and trust the historian.

At the same time, the expression of emotion by the authorial persona of Anna Komnene also adds to the pursuit of other rhetorical goals in the text. The *aidōs* of the narrator prevents the description of a terrible deed (“ἀτοπώτατον”) by Pope Gregory VII which surpasses barbarian violence (“βαρβαρικὴν ὕβριν ὑπερελαῦνον”).²⁷⁸ By refusing to define the most monstrous actions of the pope Komnene sets the level of discourse in her own Byzantine culture as superior to “western grossness.”²⁷⁹ To Komnene, Pope Gregory VII is not fit for his station (“ἀνάξιον ἀρχιερέως”) nor to call himself a Christian (“οὐδ’

καθάρματα. αἱ τῆς γαστρὸς εἰς ἀφεδρῶνα ἐκκρίσεις”, “*Lumata*: that which is thrown away in cleansing. The secretions of the stomach in the toilet” (*lambda* 835).

²⁷⁴ See Neville 2014, 272, on a passage of similarly sexually-charged vocabulary at *Alexiad* 4.8.1 where Komnene describes the tongue she would have if she were not a devoted daughter as “σοβαρός” (“rushing, violent, rousing”), an adjective connected to the feminine noun “σόβας” or “whore” in medieval Greek. Any sexualised behaviour by a woman which did not serve the purpose of the controlled and productive sexuality necessary for marriage and motherhood in Byzantine society was considered reprehensible. By the standards of Byzantine society an honourable man was concerned to ensure that the women under his control were sexually pure, much the same as a man was in antiquity (as discussed in Cairns 1993, 120). James 2008, 644, provides a concise discussion of the tension between the idealisation of women rejecting sexuality and the reality of the traditional gendered roles of marriage and motherhood, where women were necessary for the birthing of children. In Christian dogma, according to James (2009, 38), a woman is considered most dangerous through her sexuality because she is a source of temptation and the cause of Man’s Fall.

²⁷⁵ Neville 2019a, 82; 2019b, 38. See also Garland 1988, 391-3.

²⁷⁶ *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 43-4, F 39-9, S 62).

²⁷⁷ Neville 2019a, 66. For Byzantine society as a patriarchy see James 2009, 35.

²⁷⁸ *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 43-4, F 39-9, S 62).

²⁷⁹ Buckley 2014, 71.

ὄλως ἀνθρώπου χριστιανικὸν ἐπιφερομένου καὶ τοῦνομα”).²⁸⁰ The decision not to describe his actions clarifies Komnene’s anti-Latin position, brought into sharper relief later in the chapter:

The truth is that when power was transferred from Rome to our country and the Queen of Cities, not to mention the senate and the whole administration, the senior arch-bishopric was also transferred here. From the beginning the emperors have given pride of place to the [episcopal] throne of Constantinople...

μεταπεπτωκότων γὰρ τῶν σκήπτρων ἐκεῖθεν ἐνθάδε εἰς τὴν ἡμεδαπὴν τε καὶ ἡμετέραν βασιλίδα πόλιν καὶ δὴ καὶ τῆς συγκλήτου καὶ ἅμα πάσης τῆς τάξεως μεταπέπτωκε καὶ ἡ τῶν θρόνων ἀρχιερατικὴ τάξις· καὶ δεδώκασιν οἱ ἀνέκαθεν βασιλεῖς τὰ πρεσβεῖα τῷ θρόνῳ Κωνσταντινουπόλεως...²⁸¹

Not only is Pope Gregory VII a scoundrel, but Constantinople holds primacy over Rome. Thus, the depiction of the emotion of *aidōs* as experienced by the authorial persona, and therefore the gendered behaviour of Komnene, works to vilify the pope and the West.²⁸² Guiscard’s failure to fulfil his oath and bring help to the pope when asked further emphasises the image of the western empire as ridden with internal conflict and corruption.²⁸³ The side-effect of demonizing the Holy Roman Empire and its leader is the glorification of Emperor Alexios I by contrast, who will become the protector of the real Roman (Byzantine) Empire and its values, and ultimately stifle the Norman invaders coming from the West.²⁸⁴ Thus, as well as contributing to the image of a modest and appropriately feminine authorial persona, the *aidōs* of Anna Komnene also demonizes the actions of Alexios’ future enemies, a view which would have fallen on sympathetic ears in her historical context.²⁸⁵ Komnene, therefore, uses the performance of *aidōs* for a rhetorical purpose and attempts to persuade

²⁸⁰ *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 43-4, F 39-9, S 62).

²⁸¹ *Alexiad* 1.13.4 (R-K 44, F 39, S 62).

²⁸² Reinsch 2000, 96. Komnene goes on to call the pope “κατάπτυστος,” “abominable, to be spat upon,” in *Alexiad* 1.13.7 (R-K 45, F 40, S 63). For more examples of Komnene’s anti-Latin views, see *Alexiad* 10.5.5-9.3 (R-K 297-310, F 275-85, S 309-19) on the arrival of the First Crusade. See Albu 2011, 498-500, for the view that no such violent action against the envoys of Henry IV was ever taken, and rather that the allegations of said behaviour were repeated by Anna Komnene because they suited her anti-western beliefs. Buckler 1929, 308, defends Komnene against this charge, because Buckler believes she would have been unable to verify her account due to a lack of communication between the empires.

²⁸³ Buckley 2014, 69.

²⁸⁴ Sewter 2009, 486. See also the Treaty of Devol, quoted in the *Alexiad* from 13.12.1 (R-K 413-23, F 385-96, S 424-34).

²⁸⁵ See Albu 2011, 500: “Anna, like many of her contemporaries, viewed eleventh-century Rome through the prism of heated religious disputes, Crusade, and the hated Latin presence in Byzantium... Anna’s history shows the persistence of anti-Roman feelings, enflamed by the eleventh-century resurgence of papal power and the papal reassertion of universal claims.”

the audience of the baseness of Byzantium's enemies, thereby justifying Alexios' future actions as emperor when he comes into conflict with the West.

The Entire Heresy of the Bogomils

Later in the *Alexiad* a similar chain of emotional logic appears. Once again, Anna Komnene finds herself unable to repeat certain details. The penultimate narrative sequence of the *Alexiad* concerns the inquiry and trial of the heretics known as the Bogomils. When their leader Basil is moved to a new prison cell near the imperial palace an omen occurs. Stones fall from a cloudless sky in the middle of the night against the roof and a sudden earthquake follows.²⁸⁶ The authorial persona of Komnene enters the narrative to end the scene, quoting Sappho in the process:

No more of that omen in this account. I wished to narrate the entire heresy of the Bogomils, but “shame prevents me,” as the beautiful Sappho says somewhere, because I am both historian and woman, born in the Porphyra, the most honoured and the very first of the children of Alexios – on the one hand I wish to write things, going to the hearing of many, that are worthy of silence [i.e. gossip], that I might present the whole of the heresy of the Bogomils, but so that I do not defile my tongue, I pass over these matters. I refer those wishing to perceive the entire heresy of the Bogomils to a book thus-named *Dogmatika Panoplia*, put together by command of my father.

τὰ μὲν οὖν τοῦ τέρατος τούτου ταῦτη ἐχέτω. ἠβουλόμην δὲ καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν τῶν Βογομίλων διηγῆσασθαι αἴρεσιν, ἀλλὰ με κωλύει καὶ αἰδώς, ὡς πού φησιν ἡ καλὴ Σαπφώ, ὅτι συγγραφεὺς ἔγωγε γυνὴ καὶ τῆς πορφύρας τὸ τιμιώτατον καὶ τῶν Ἀλεξίου πρώτιστον βλάστημα, τὰ τε εἰς ἀκοὴν πολλῶν ἐρχόμενα σιγῆς ἄξια βούλομαι μὲν γράφειν, ἵνα τὸ πλῆρες τῆς τῶν Βογομίλων παραστήσω αἰρέσεως, ἀλλ’ ἵνα μὴ τὴν γλῶτταν μολύνω τὴν ἑμαυτῆς, παρήμι ταῦτα. παραπέμπω δὲ τοὺς βουλομένους τὴν ὅλην αἴρεσιν τῶν Βογομίλων διαγνῶναι εἰς τὸ οὕτω καλούμενον βιβλίον Δογματικὴν Πανοπλίαν ἐξ ἐπιταγῆς τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς συντεθείσαν.²⁸⁷

Following her recommendation of the *Dogmatike Panoplia* Komnene extols its author, Euthymios Zigabenos, and then returns to the fate of Basil and his disciples.²⁸⁸ The sequence ends with Basil being burned alive in the Hippodrome.²⁸⁹ Komnene begins by suggesting

²⁸⁶ *Alexiad* 15.8.7 (R-K 488, F 458, S 499).

²⁸⁷ *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500). The translation is my own.

²⁸⁸ See Migne 1857-1866 for the text of the *Dogmatika Panoplia* in Greek and chapter 27 therein for the heresy of the Bogomils. The dogma of the Bogomils is described in the *Alexiad* (15.8.1, R-K 485-6, F 455, S 496) as a combination of “the impiety of the Manichaeans” and the “bestly behaviour of the Massalians.” The *ODB* records that the Bogomils denied most of the doctrines of the Orthodox church and considered the material world to be the creation and realm of the Devil (s.v. “Bogomils,” 1991).

²⁸⁹ *Alexiad* 15.10.4 (R-K 492-3, F 462-3, S 503-4).

she would rather not discuss the omen (“τοῦ τέρατος τούτου ταύτη ἐχέτω”). She then goes on to state that she wants to describe (“ἠβουλόμην... διηγήσασθαι”) every part of the Bogomilian heresy related to said omen, but her *aidōs* prevents her (“ἀλλά με κωλύει καὶ αἰδώζ”) as Sappho once said somewhere (“ὧς πού φησιν ἡ καλὴ Σαπφώ,” note that Komnene does not say where exactly). Observing an appropriate level of *aidōs* is presented in the following clauses as directly related to her role as both a historian (“συγγραφεὺς”) and her gender (“γυνή”), along with the special circumstances of her birth in the *Porphyra* in the Great Palace of Constantinople (“τῆς πορφύρας”) and the honour she holds (“τὸ τιμιώτατον”) as the first of her father the emperor’s children (“πρώτιστον βλάστημα”). It would not do for such a person to repeat gossip (“τά τε εἰς ἀκοὴν πολλῶν ἐρχόμενα”), but Komnene restates her desire to give a full account of the Bogomils nevertheless (“βούλομαι... γράφειν”). The narrator eventually decides upon passing over the topic (“παρήμι ταῦτα”) to avoid defiling (“μολύνω”) her tongue (“τὴν γλῶτταν... τὴν ἐμαυτῆς”), implying that to ignore her sense of *aidōs* would result in a serious transgression of speech, and such a transgression would be necessary in a narrative of the Bogomilian heresy. For any readers wondering what these subjects which stain tongues might be, Komnene recommends a book on the topic ordered by Emperor Alexios (“ἔξ ἐπιταγῆς τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς”).

The performance of the emotion of *aidōs* at 15.9.1 shares many similarities with the earlier example at 1.13.3. Once again, Anna Komnene portrays her authorial persona as aware of her “shame” (“αἰδώζ”), and this shame prevents her (“κωλύει”) from narrating the entire heresy of the Bogomils (“πᾶσαν τὴν τῶν Βογομίλων... αἴρεσιν”).²⁹⁰ Komnene provides more reasons for experiencing *aidōs* in this passage, as signalled by “ὅτι,” including not only her gender (“ἔγωγε γυνή”) but also the room where she was born and her status as the first of Emperor Alexios’ children.²⁹¹ Though Komnene asserts that she is a writer too (“συγγραφεύς”), and thereby draws attention to her use of traditionally masculine authorial power, her use of “ἔγωγε” marks a strong intrusion of her authorial position in the register of the genre in which she writes.²⁹² Komnene depicts her authorial persona focused on her role as the daughter of her subject and the prestige which comes with being born in a

²⁹⁰ *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500).

²⁹¹ *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500).

²⁹² *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500). See Neville 2019b, 42, on the Byzantine belief that nobility (especially being born in the Porphyra) brought a greater ability to possess self-control.

special room that connects her to centuries of Byzantine rulers.²⁹³ And once again, the potential outcome of ignoring her *aidōs* in the pursuit of narrative details is defilement (“μολύνω”), in the same vocabulary of 1.13.3, but this time with respect to Komnene’s tongue (“τὴν γλῶτταν... τὴν ἐμαυτῆς”).²⁹⁴ The sort of tongue Komnene would have if her sense of *aidōs* were not so strong is thus linked to pollution, insolence and sexual impropriety.²⁹⁵ The performance of the emotion of *aidōs* as experienced by the authorial persona results in the evasion of a shameful deed likened to sexual immodesty, and thus she presents herself acting as a good daughter and modest woman so that her father Emperor Alexios loses no honour for her narrative choices.²⁹⁶ As before, the reader is encouraged to see the narrator as imbued with an appropriate level of feminine modesty and therefore to find no fault in the historian.

One way that this passage at 15.9.1 differs to 1.13.3, however, is that Anna Komnene supplies another source for the narrative details which her emotions prevent her from repeating. Alongside encouraging the trust of the reader through her performance of appropriate femininity, Komnene uses her *aidōs* to pursue another rhetorical goal in her text; that of preserving and celebrating the deeds of her father Emperor Alexios I Komnenos. As she is performing the role of a good, modest woman, Komnene passes over the topic of the Bogomils (“παρήμι ταῦτα”) because her *aidōs* prevents her from repeating things which are “worthy of silence” (“σιγῆς ἄξια”).²⁹⁷ So, akin to Pope Gregory VII in 1.13.3, the Bogomilian heretics are degraded due to the connection Komnene makes between their

²⁹³ See Macrides 1996, 219, for consideration of the fact that while Emperor Alexios I Komnenos is long dead and therefore no longer concerned with the conduct of his daughter, a key part of the self-fashioning of Anna Komnene is her connection to her subject. See Chapter 3: Methodology; Gender on the *Porphyra*.

²⁹⁴ *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500).

²⁹⁵ Again, see Neville 2014, 272, for Komnene’s disavowal of a “sexually charged vocabulary” of speech. Komnene uses the Attic spelling of “tongue,” “γλῶττα,” instead of the more common “γλῶσσα” which appears at *Alexiad* 4.8.1 (R-K 138, F 126, S 151). A modern reader would be forgiven for thinking that phrasing one’s tongue as the direct object of a verb within the semantic field of sexual activity and verbs like *lesbīsai* would make this use of *molunō* more emphatic, redolent as it is of cunnilingus and fellatio. However, “to lesbise” is figured in works from late antiquity as defilement of the mouth, “τὸ στόμα,” rather than the tongue, as depicted in the *Lexikon* of Photios I of Constantinople (vol. 2, page 497, *lambda* 207) and the *Suda* (*lambda* 306). Therefore, the potential defilement of Anna Komnene’s tongue is no more sexually charged than that of her pen and paper at 1.13.3. Ascribing different sexual proclivities to foreign communities is fairly common in Ancient Greek (see Adams 1990, 202) but as Gilhuly (2015, 147-9) notes, the sexual act implied by verbs which translate as “to do like the lesbian women” is uncertain. Dover (1980, 182 n.36) raised this uncertainty earlier, but also added that “fellatio is impossible without opening the mouth.”

²⁹⁶ Neville 2016, 53. Galatariotou 1985, 69, notes that the expression of misogyny in works by woman writers, such as Anna Komnene, is the result of the “reality” of the patriarchal structure of Byzantine culture. Patriarchal assumptions, like the idea that a father has control over the behaviour of his daughter and any action she makes deemed shameful reflects badly on his masculinity, permeate every aspect of social formation.

²⁹⁷ *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500).

heresy and immodest discourse and Emperor Alexios appears more pious by contrast.²⁹⁸ Ideologically, Alexios has triumphed over evil, and indeed later in Book 15 Komnene refers to his suppression of the heresy of the Bogomils as a “contest” (“ἄθλον”), a word with Homeric connotations which suggests the winner will also be the recipient of a prize.²⁹⁹ The narrative of the Bogomilian heresy is clearly important in the context of Alexios’ reign and furthermore, as stated in the *prooimion*, Komnene wishes to recall “as much as possible” (“ὅσας”) and leave nothing behind in silence (“σιγή”) or in an ocean of obscurity (“εἰς πέλαγος ἀμνημοσύνης”).³⁰⁰ To emphasise the story her performance of appropriate feminine modesty prevents her from repeating, in 15.9.1 Komnene presents an authorial persona who possesses a strong desire to speak as communicated in the repetition of forms of βούλομαι combined with complementary infinitives for expressing information (“I wished to explain,” “ἠβουλόμην... διηγῆσασθαι”; “I wish to write,” “βούλομαι... γράφειν”).³⁰¹ Before Komnene leaves the matter behind entirely she repeats the idea of knowing all about the heresy of the Bogomils once more, recommending “those wishing to perceive the entire heresy” (“τοὺς βουλομένους τὴν ὅλην αἴρεσιν... διαγνῶναι”) to another book, the *Dogmatike Panoplia*, a gesture which reveals not only her commitment to the level of research required for an effective historian but also her concern for the deeds of her father to be remembered, albeit in someone else’s book.³⁰² In order to convince readers she is a trustworthy historian, Komnene performs the emotion of *aidōs* to enact the gender role expected of her by the audience. And when this gender role comes into conflict with the role of historian and the goals of the history, Komnene adopts a strategy of emphasis, preserving her modesty while stressing the importance of that which she cannot talk about.

These two passages (1.13.3, 15.9.1) contain much of note regarding the self-fashioning of the authorial persona and the rhetorical challenge of creating a positive impression on the audience while engaged in the situational gender inversion of being a woman writing history. Komnene’s authorial persona declares that her *aidōs* inhibits her

²⁹⁸ Neville 2016, 53 on not repeating immodest discourse; 142 on Basil the Bogomil providing a counter-example for Alexios’ proper care for religion during his reign. See Magdalino 2000, 34-5, on the insertion of the Bogomilian heresy in Book 15 of the *Alexiad* as an intentional manoeuvre for the purpose of ending the narrative on a note of ideological triumph. Treadgold 2013, 371, suggests that the episode may be out of chronological order because Komnene did not want the heresy to interrupt an account of a military campaign, or her sources were unable to recall when the heresy happened.

²⁹⁹ *Alexiad* 15.10.5 (R-K 493, F 463, S 504). LSJ s.v. “ἄθλος.”

³⁰⁰ *Alexiad Pr.* 1.2 (R-K 6, F3, S 17-18).

³⁰¹ *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500). The concept of retelling the “entire” or the “whole” of the heresy is repeated too (“πᾶσαν”; “τὸ πλῆρες”), and the latter example is the object of another verb for organising information, “I present, set before” (“παραστήσω”).

³⁰² *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500). This recommendation reflects well on Emperor Alexios too, as he is responsible for commissioning the book (“ἐξ ἐπιταγῆς τοῦμοῦ πατρὸς συντεθεῖσαν,” 15.9.1).

ability to narrate certain details concerning the reign of her father because of various reasons, not least of all gender and class, and thus she signals to the audience that her natural feminine modesty did not leave her when she began the masculinizing task of writing history. Displays of modesty or shame constitute a viable method of lowering the perceptive and searching eyes of the historian to assume the humble stance expected of women in the patriarchal structures of Byzantium. Komnene presents herself as subject to her emotion and the effect of these performances of modesty, like those of her grief, is her partial self-effacement. The performance of emotion enables the authorial persona to act with the appropriate femininity required for a Byzantine audience to consider Komnene as in possession of good character.³⁰³ Komnene wants the reader to see her stopped by her *aidōs*.

Yet there is more than one strategy at play in these passages of *aidōs*, as one should expect of an educated writer skilled in rhetoric, like Komnene was. The circumstances in the text of the *Alexiad* that seem to provoke moments of *aidōs* are not the same as those which provoke self-pity and lamentation. Neville argued that Komnene moves to weep about her misfortunes shortly after passages in which she substantiates her skills as a historian.³⁰⁴ The act of participating in Greek historiography constitutes breaking the cultural rules which govern the behaviour of good Byzantine women, and so Komnene mitigates potentially arrogant and immodest claims to education and authorship by immediately presenting herself as piteous.³⁰⁵ But the passages surrounding the protestations of *aidōs*, however, appear to have little to do with historical methodology. Rather, Komnene seems concerned to present herself acting modestly amid other people's immodest behaviour, not her own. Thus, I would further nuance the argument made by Leonora Neville regarding the agenda of emotion in the *Alexiad* and state that Anna Komnene also uses performances of *aidōs* to achieve the necessary task as a historian of evaluating the actions of men without needing to be explicit and consequently impinging upon her self-presentation as a virtuous woman.³⁰⁶ The use of emotion thereby constitutes a strategy for performing femininity and counteracting the transgressive behaviour required to fulfil the rhetorical goals of the *Alexiad*. The deeds of Emperor Alexios are remembered, and its narrator holds true to the high standard of behaviour expected of her.

³⁰³ Neville 2019a, 87.

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 83.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., 81-2, contains the point that Komnene put herself in the "inappropriate" position, as a woman, of standing in judgement over men because she was writing a history which entailed evaluating the deeds of men.

Sappho Fragment 137 V

Sappho Fragment 137 V has always been somewhat multivalent due to the ambiguity of the roles of the speakers. This chapter now proposes an intertextual reading that suggests Komnene was conscious of the fact that the line of Sappho Fragment 137 V which she uses in defence of her choice to pursue appropriate feminine behaviour rather than meet the expectations of masculine historical writing was uttered by a male speaker in the poem and thus constitutes a coded claim that she possesses a similarly innate masculine level of self-control. A likely link between the presence of Sappho Fragment 137 V in the literary scene of the Byzantine Empire and the intellectual activities of Komnene, and thus evidence of her conscious choice of authorship, does exist. Linguistic similarities suggest that the “somewhere” (“πού”) Komnene quotes Sappho from is Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, a text which received some attention in twelfth-century Constantinople due to her efforts as a patron of literature and which she was likely well acquainted with.³⁰⁷ Furthermore, the practice of alluding to a source-text but not specifying its title is not due to ignorance but rather Byzantine historiographical practices, where titles of works were seldom named because authors quoted from memory, or at least wanted to give the impression that they did.³⁰⁸ In the *prooimion* of the *Alexiad* Komnene lists having read the works of Aristotle thoroughly as one of the many facets of her education (“καὶ τὰς ἀριστοτελικὰς τέχνας εὖ ἀναλεξαμένη”).³⁰⁹ Moreover, the funeral oration for Komnene, written by George Tornikios, relates that she gathered a group of scholars around her and directed their work with a special emphasis on the commissioning of commentaries on works of Aristotle which had no surviving commentaries available.³¹⁰ Sappho Fragment 137 V seems to have survived only in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and two commentaries on the *Rhetoric* which date to the twelfth century and appear to have been written in Constantinople as part of the organised initiative to revitalise Aristotelian scholarship led by Komnene.³¹¹ One can argue with reasonable

³⁰⁷ *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500).

³⁰⁸ Hunger 1969-70, 29.

³⁰⁹ *Alexiad Pr.* 1.2 (R-K 5, F 3, S 17). Later in *Alexiad* 15.7.9, during an attack on the current schooling system, Komnene describes her education again and asserts that she “engaged with philosophy and... eagerly turned to the poets and historians” (“φιλοσοφίας ἠψάμην καὶ... πρὸς ποιητὰς τε καὶ ξυγγραφεῖς ἤϊξα”, R-K 485, F 455, S 496).

³¹⁰ See Darrouzès 1970, 220-323, for a French translation of the oration with facing Greek. Conley 1990, 38; Browning 1964, 16; Browning 1962, 6. Kennedy 1994, 223, notes that these twelfth-century commentaries on Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* are the only extant commentaries.

³¹¹ Voigt 1971, 134. See Vogiatzi 2019, 12-18 on dating the commentaries and 31-33 on Anna Komnene’s circle. The commentary with an anonymous author dates to the early years of the reign of John II Komnenos (1118-43), no later than 1122, and Stephanos’ dates to not long after. Anna Komnene’s *Alexiad*, for reference, was composed ca. 1138-53. Several features in the commentaries suggest the authors belong to the same philosophical community. In brief, Stephanos seems to direct criticism at the earlier anonymous commentary.

confidence, then, that she knew of the Sappho fragment from her role as the patron of a scholarly circle, two members of which wrote commentaries on the *Rhetoric* at her behest.

Interpreting Sappho Fragment 137 V has proved to be a contentious topic through the ages, and the Byzantine commentaries seem to have developed their understanding of the poem from the context of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle, writing in the fourth century BCE, is the earliest extant source for the fragment, and from his *Rhetoric* one gets the impression that the poem is a dialogue concerning speech and *aidōs* between the seventh-century BCE lyric poets of Lesbos, Alkaios and Sappho. The *Rhetoric* is a treatise in three books in which Aristotle makes distinctions between the three means of persuasion and the three types of public speech.³¹² Aristotle argues that whatever produces virtue is noble (“ἀνάγκη τὰ τε ποιητικά τῆς ἀρετῆς εἶναι καλά”).³¹³ He then goes on to say:

And it is the opposite otherwise for those things which are disgraceful: for men feel disgrace to say, do, or think of doing disgraceful things, just as Sappho put into poetry after Alkaios spoke...

καὶ τὰ ἐναντία ἢ ἐφ' οἷς αἰσχύνονται· τὰ γὰρ αἰσχρὰ αἰσχύνονται καὶ λέγοντες καὶ ποιοῦντες καὶ μέλλοντες, ὥσπερ καὶ Σαπφῶ πεποίηκεν, εἰπόντος τοῦ Ἀλκαίου...³¹⁴

The context in which Sappho Fragment 137 V appears is this discussion of the idea that whatever produces a disgraceful thing is bad and the opposite of noble. It appears that Alkaios is the first speaker and Sappho the second.³¹⁵ One reads the poem with this order of the two speakers in mind:

I want to say something but shame
prevents me...

It is highly likely that the author of the anonymous commentary was also the author of a commentary on *Nicomachean Ethics*, making them a commentator on two of the Aristotelian treatises largely rejected in antiquity and thus probably connected to Komnene's plan to study the least known of the Aristotle's texts. Stephanos also wrote many commentaries on the Aristotelian treatises. See Conley 1990, 29-44 for a history of the engagement of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in Byzantium. See Frankopan 2009, 48, for the authorship of Stephanos' commentaries on Aristotelian treatises and Anna Komnene as a “lightning-rod patron.”

³¹² The philosopher describes what makes topics of speech noble (“καλός”) or disgraceful (“αἰσχρός”) to show the means by which a speaker may reveal their character. Concomitantly, the character of a speaker determines the level of confidence the listener has in the speaker's virtue (“ἀρετή”).

³¹³ *Rhetoric* I.9, 1366b25-6.

³¹⁴ *Rhetoric* I.9, 1367a6-9. I use Ross 1975, 38, for my text. The translation is my own.

³¹⁵ Sappho, in the nominative case (1367a8, “Σαπφῶ”), is the subject of the verb for “I make, create” (1367a9, “πεποίηκεν”) and thus one can confidently say she is the author of some part of the forthcoming quotation. Alkaios, too, is associated with a verb of speaking (1367a9, “εἰπόντος”). The participle therefore sets up the action of Alkaios, in this case his speech, as occurring prior to the action of Sappho.

Yet if you had a desire for good or beautiful things
and your tongue were not concocting some evil to say,
shame would not hold down your eyes
but rather you would speak about what is just

θέλω τί τ' εἶπην, ἀλλά με κωλύει
αἴδωσ . . .

.....
[αἰ δ' ἦχεσ ἔκλων ἴμερον ἢ κάλων
καὶ μή τί τ' εἶπην γλώσσ' ἐκύκα κάκων,
αἴδωσ †κέν σε οὐκ† ἦχεν ὄππατ',
ἀλλ' ἔλεγες †περὶ τῷ δικαίῳ]³¹⁶

Aristotle then moves on and continues to list the attributes of noble things.³¹⁷ The philosopher's use of the poem implies that Alkaios, the first speaker, is not acting nobly because he admits to feeling “shame” (“αἴδωσ”) and therefore suggests that he is thinking of something disgraceful.³¹⁸ Sappho's response is in tune with Aristotle's thesis for this chapter: the behaviour of Alkaios, as depicted by his own admission and her evaluation that he cannot make eye contact with her, is indicative of a man in an ashamed state because he is considering saying something disgraceful.³¹⁹ An examination of the fragment in the work of Aristotle thereby suggests that the fragment is a dialogue.³²⁰

Komnene, however, makes no mention of Alkaios in her quotation in *Alexiad* 15.9.1 and the poem appears to be understood differently in her corner of twelfth-century Byzantium. As a close reading of the passages shows, the two commentaries by the members of Komnene's intellectual circle are more confident in the attribution of the poem to Sappho. The anonymous commentator associated with Komnene, and the earlier of the two twelfth-century commentaries, seems doubtful of Alkaios' authorship of the first lines of Sappho Fragment 137 V. They are brief in their treatment of the poem:

For Sappho put in verse Alkaios saying
“I want to say something, but shame prevents me”
“Yet if you had a desire for good things”,
Oh! That you had come to desire for good things. Then, in turn, the rest of
the song
“...and were your tongue were not concocting some evil to say,

³¹⁶ *Rhetoric* I.9, 1367a10-15. I use Voigt 1971, 134, for my text (see p. 135 in the same volume for a discussion of the *obeli*). The translation is by Anne Carson (2002, 279) who also uses Voigt as her text.

³¹⁷ *Rhetoric* I.9, 1367a16f.

³¹⁸ *Rhetoric* I.9, 1367a10.

³¹⁹ *Rhetoric* I.9, 1367a14.

³²⁰ As no source is cited, the question of how these two speakers came to be in the same poem is unresolved. Bowra 1961, 224, questions if Aristotle inferred the authorship of the poem due to the use of alcaic metre.

shame would not hold down your eyes,
but rather you would speak about what is just.”

So some say thus, “would that you had come. But if you would come for the desire of good things and your tongue were not stirring up some bad thing to say, shame would not be holding down your eyes.”

πεποίηκε γὰρ ἡ Σαπφῶ λέγοντα τὸν Ἀλκαῖον
“θέλω τί τ’ εἰπεῖν, ἀλλά με κωλύει αἰδῶς”
“αἴθ’ ἦκες ἐς ἐσθλῶν ἴμερον”,
ἦτοι αἴθε ἦλθες ἐς ἴμερον τῶν ἀγαθῶν. εἶτα πάλιν ἕτερον ἔπος
“καὶ μὴ τί τ’ εἰπεῖν γλῶσσ’ ἐκύκα κακόν,
αἰδῶς κέν σε οὐκ εἶχεν ὄμματα,
ἀλλ’ ἔλεγες περὶ ᾧ δικαίω”.
τινὲς δὲ οὕτω λέγουσιν ‘αἴδ’ ἦκες. ἐὰν δ’ ἦκες ἐς ἐσθλῶν ἴμερον καὶ μὴ ἐκύκα
γλῶσσά σου τι κακὸν εἰπεῖν, οὐκ ἂν εἶχέ σου τὰ ὄμματα αἰδῶς’.³²¹

The vocabulary introducing the fragment is similar, but the anonymous commentator frames the reply of Alkaios as the direct object of the verb “πεποίηκε,” with Sappho still as its subject, and thus suggests that Sappho wrote the entire dialogue and characterised the other speaker as a persona of the poet Alkaios.³²² Such a reading would account for why Sappho chose to write the poem in the alcaic metre, the metre which Alkaios is most famous for and which Sappho otherwise does not use.³²³ Critically, however, the anonymous commentator suggests that the authorship of Alkaios was not unanimously accepted by twelfth-century readers of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* in Byzantium.³²⁴ Komnene’s attribution of the first line of the fragment to Sappho in *Alexiad* 15.9.1 thus seems to be an informed choice based on the understanding of the *Rhetoric* in her literary circle.

The second of the two twelfth-century commentaries from Anna Komnene’s circle is attributed to Stephanos, and dates to within a few years after that of the anonymous author. Stephanos suggests Sappho “led” the dialogue, regardless of whether the poet Alkaios was intended to be understood as the first speaker or not:

Whether the poet Alkaios loved a certain maiden or some other person did, so nevertheless Sappho produced the dialogue: and the lover says to the beloved, “I wish to say something to you, but I hesitate, I am ashamed, I am

³²¹ AIAAR 1367a8.22-31. I use Rabe 1896, 51, for my text. The translation is my own.

³²² AIAAR 1367a8.22. Bowra 1961, 225, finds this reading of the commentary plausible, but he presumes the anonymous commentator “knew the complete texts” of Sappho and Alkaios, which is unlikely due to Sappho Fragment 137 V appearing only in the *Rhetoric*. Page 1955, 108, is critical of this reading of the poem and cites the fact that only two other extant fragments of Sappho use the dialogue form (114 and 140a). Another possible reading of the commentary is that Alkaios was responsible for composing the first two lines of the poem and Sappho then wrote his speech down and responded, as suggested in Burton 2011, 71 n.49.

³²³ Page 1955, 106-8.

³²⁴ Bowra 1961, 225.

disgraced,” then afterwards in turn the maiden says to him “but if you were good and one about to say something good, you would not be ashamed and be so disgraced, but you would speak with frankness, and look at me without blushing.”

Εἴτε ὁ Ἀλκαῖος ὁ ποιητὴς ἦρα κόρης τινὸς ἢ ἄλλος τις ἦρα, παράγει οὖν ὅμως ἢ Σαπφῶ διάλογον· καὶ λέγει ὁ ἐρῶν πρὸς τὴν ἐρωμένην ‘θέλω τι εἰπεῖν πρὸς σέ, ἀλλὰ ἐντρέπομαι, αἰδοῦμαι, αἰσχύνομαι’, εἴτ’ αὖθις ἀμοιβαδὶς ἡ κόρη λέγει πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ‘ἀλλ’ ἐὰν ἦς ἀγαθὸς καὶ ὁ ἔμελλες πρὸς μὲ εἰπεῖν ἦν ἀγαθόν, οὐκ ἂν ἦδοῦ καὶ ἡσχύνου οὕτως, ἀλλὰ μετὰ παρρησίας ἔλεγες ἂν βλέπων πρὸς μὲ ἀνερευθριάστως’.³²⁵

The way in which this commentary introduces the Sappho fragment differs to the accounts of the anonymous commentator and Aristotle, and Stephanos does not quote the fragment in full either. Stephanos also doubts whether Alkaios is intended to be understood as the male speaker at all (“Εἴτε ὁ Ἀλκαῖος ὁ ποιητὴς ἦρα κόρης τινὸς ἢ ἄλλος τις ἦρα”).³²⁶ Rather, he suggests the poem is a dialogue produced by Sappho (“παράγει οὖν ὅμως ἢ Σαπφῶ διάλογον”), using the verb “παράγω” to describe how the poem was recorded.³²⁷ Stephanos frames the dialogue as a lover speaking to his beloved (“ὁ ἐρῶν πρὸς τὴν ἐρωμένην”), and the beloved is a maiden (“ἡ κόρη”).³²⁸ The assigned gender of the two speakers is consistent across all three of the *Rhetoric* texts, and Stephanos introduces the idea that the poem is not concerned with the personae of the poets Sappho and Alkaios.³²⁹ Thus, the literary circle of Komnene appears to have doubts about the authorship of Alkaios, but confidence in the attribution of the genders of the speakers. With this examination of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* and the commentaries from her associates in mind, there is evidence to suggest that Komnene seems to have based her decision to attribute the fragment to Sappho on a pre-existing argument present in her literary community. Sappho is the poet Komnene credits the phrase to, a win for Sappho in terms of the goals of competitive poetry of the sixth-century BCE and a starting point from which an intertextual reading is possible.³³⁰

³²⁵ *SIARC* 1367a8.30-5. I use Rabe 1896, 280-1, for my text. The translation is my own.

³²⁶ *SIARC* 1367a8.30-1.

³²⁷ *SIARC* 1367a8.31.

³²⁸ Cf. Page 1955, 108-9.

³²⁹ *SIARC* 1367a8.31-2; 1367a8.33. For the interpretation of Sappho’s words as “chilly” and therefore evidence that the poem was not intended to be read as a dialogue between Sappho and Alkaios, see Bowra 1961, 225, who finds her tone surprising given that the only other extant line attributed to Alkaios about Sappho expresses admiration and high praise (Alkaios, Fragment 384 V). Bowra (1961, 226) provides some other points in favour of Stephanos’ interpretation that the speakers in the poem are not intended to be understood as Sappho and Alkaios: 1) A dialogue between a fictional (or highly stylised personae of a) man and a woman was a literary form in Greek poetry. Horace’s *Carmina* 3.9 is one such example. 2) The tone of the reply – as interpreted by Bowra – seems more like a popular song than an address from Sappho to Alkaios; 3) Aristotle is not always correct regarding his attribution of authors.

³³⁰ Burton 2011, 74.

By placing herself in the role of a man declaring his feeling of shame and governing his own behaviour to then act accordingly, Komnene seems to suggest that she surpasses her society's highest expectations of her own gender. Byzantine society perceived that men had an innate ability to master *pathos* and exercise high levels of self-control, and women could only approach these heights of virtue through hard work.³³¹ In the context of the *Alexiad*, Komnene quotes the first lines of Sappho Fragment 137 V and so renders herself as the male speaker in the fragment feeling *aidōs* at the thought of what he wants to say to the woman listening.³³² Moreover, *Alexiad* 1.13.3 and 15.9.1 share linguistic similarities and the idiomatic expression of shame preventing narration, and so a similar rhetorical manoeuvre seems to occur early in the narrative too.³³³ Several commentators on Sappho have noted that the hesitation of the male speakers implies sexual impropriety in the behaviour his *aidōs* prevented, thus strengthening the argument made above that Komnene associates immodesty of speech with sexual immodesty, and also that the behaviour of the pope and the Bogomils was intensely inappropriate.³³⁴ Adherence to one's *aidōs* is an idealised trait of both men and women in Byzantium, but the intertextual relationship between the *Alexiad* and Sappho Fragment 137 V seems to show Komnene advocating for her own brand of masculine self-control. Her quotation of Sappho as a learned and skilled rhetorician is one more way in which she can be perceived claiming the power to write masculine discourse.³³⁵ Komnene subverts the gendered assumption that Byzantine women were weak and vehicles for dishonour and shame by using her powers of rhetoric to emphasise her strong *aidōs* and thus her immaculate behaviour as a narrator.³³⁶ That fact that these passages of *aidōs* preventing narration which connect Komnene and the poet Sappho occur at either end of a lengthy history of politics and war perhaps reveals, as Ruth Macrides has argued, that Anna Komnene is conscious of being a woman writer.³³⁷ Komnene thus adopts the speech of a male character in a poem written by a woman to show that she possesses a similar innate

³³¹ Neville 2019b, 27.

³³² *Rhetoric* I.9, 1367a10-11.

³³³ Compare *Alexiad* 1.13.3 (R-K 43-4, F 39-9, S 62): "I would have spoken of that violence, if womanly and imperial shame did not prevent me"; εἶπον ἂν καὶ τὴν ὕβριν, εἰ μὴ με καὶ γυναικεία καὶ βασιλικὴ ἐπέχεν αἰδώς"; *Alexiad* 15.9.1 (R-K 489, F 458-9, S 499-500): "I wished to narrate the entire heresy of the Bogomils, but 'shame prevents me'; "ἠβουλόμην δὲ καὶ πᾶσαν τὴν τῶν Βογομίλων διηγῆσασθαι αἴρεσιν, ἀλλὰ με κωλύει καὶ αἰδώς." See Hunger 1969-70, 29, for the observation that Byzantine authors did not often name their sources.

³³⁴ Burton 2011, 72; Zellner 2010, 61; Nagy 2007, 7.

³³⁵ Papaioannou 2012, 116. Komnene also simultaneously erases Alkaios' claims of authorship – and thus she erases the claims of a male author to discourse.

³³⁶ Neville 2016, 16; McGrath 2012, 96.

³³⁷ Macrides 1996, 218. See also Buckler 1929, 4: "If Sappho excites our admiration as the first woman poet, Anna is the first woman historian."

propensity for self-control that a man does, and claims on behalf of aristocratic women the ability to write persuasively of the thoughts and actions of men. The private world of Anna Komnene with regard to her contemplation of her culture's definitions of appropriate feminine behaviour thereby comes into view.

Conclusion: Double Consciousness

Taking into consideration the intertextual readings of the characterisations of Anna Dalassene, Gaita, Emma and the authorial persona of Anna Komnene herself, the double consciousness of the author seems apparent in the *Alexiad*. Komnene seems to stake claims for women in the public arenas traditionally dominated by men and argues that they can do so without undermining their places within the family and thus stepping into the role of the evil or dangerous woman.³³⁸ For example, Anna Dalassene can hold power as regent without showing ambition and thus calling into question her son's decision to appoint her. Gaita and Emma, too, are shown as duly deferential to their male relatives in the public arena of martial strategy, when those male relatives are present. Komnene claims for herself the position of author of a history and thus makes an enduring display of filling a role traditionally occupied by men. Her gesture of affinity towards Sappho, another woman-author who tested the traditions of her socio-historical context, could easily have been received by her contemporary readers as a signal of her intentions to be remembered in a similar way to the author of one of her source texts.

All the women discussed in this thesis are also shown acting with some degree of awareness concerning the private expectations of their behaviour. Dalassene uses her age and a presentation of her renowned piety to force a display of amnesty from the emperor, Emma plays the part of a submissive woman to manipulate Kontostephanos, Gaita advises Guiscard from the bedroom and Komnene at a surface reading uses her womanly modesty to defer from narrating inappropriate topics. Both imperial and barbarian women alike show agency and self-control, and the passages at 1.13.3 and 15.9.1 are highlighted moments when Komnene draws attention to herself acting in that same fashion. The passages in the text which show women performing emotions and manipulating their society's gendered expectations of their own behaviour provide compelling evidence that Komnene, their narrator, is aware of the tension in the practice of reporting masculine content in the tones appropriate for feminine discourse. The *Alexiad* is therefore a composition intended for the

³³⁸ Galatariotou 1985, 78: "In sharp contrast to evil women, good women are placed firmly within the context of the family."

public whilst also being from a world other than that of male-dominated historiographic tradition, where women show an awareness of how their behaviour will be interpreted by viewers, and thus reveal that they are a minority with knowledge of their own woman-centered language of behaviour and the language of the public arena of men.³³⁹

Anna Komnene depicts her authorial persona as a modest woman conscious of her class in order to serve multiple rhetorical goals in the text. Komnene identifies herself as a princess of the imperial family and incapable of repeating certain narrative details for fear of an infringement of her own sexual modesty, and thereby prevents the subject of her history, her father, from losing honour because of her choices as the narrator. The goal of her performances of the emotion of *aidōs* in the text is the good opinion of the audience, and so she depicts herself adhering to her sense of modesty amidst the immodest behaviour of others in the narrative. One result of this rhetorical strategy is that Komnene is able to fulfil the task of the historian to evaluate the actions of the male subjects of her history without sullyng her tongue and thereby violating her self-presentation as a virtuous woman. Her displays of emotion can therefore be interpreted as a strategy to counter the inherently transgressive action of being a woman writing a history. Furthermore, this chapter has made a plausible case for the context of Anna Komnene's understanding of Sappho Fragment 137 V and her attribution of the authorship of the poem to Sappho by reviewing the twelfth-century commentaries of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Applying Winkler's theory of double consciousness to the *Alexiad* shows that Komnene was conscious of being a woman-writer and that she attributes to other women in the text an awareness of how gendered behaviour can be manipulated. The intertextual relationship between the fragment of Sappho and the *Alexiad* thus reveals Komnene's claim to the innate self-control afforded to men in Byzantium, and also her consideration of expectations of feminine behaviour in her society.

³³⁹ Winkler 2002, 52.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Women are depicted in positions of power at multiple points in the *Alexiad*, but seldom in contradiction with the patriarchal structure of the family unit. In this study I have examined the depictions of Anna Dalassene, Gaita of Salerno, Emma of Hauteville and the authorial persona of Anna Komnene, yet this topic is by no means exhausted. Irene Doukaina, Maria of Alania, the Norman princess Helena, the sisters of Anna Komnene, several more aristocratic women involved in the coup of the Komnenoi and the serving-girl who surprises a would-be assassin all await discussion, and almost all of their depictions contain signposted references to classical source texts. What is more, allusions to Biblical literature were not considered in this study, and so there too remains a fruitful field of analysis. The *Alexiad* has much more to tell the scholars of Byzantine studies.

The analyses of the depictions of my selection of women in the *Alexiad* have demonstrated how the author characterises these women in the text and the ways in which they held power. The chapters demonstrate that these women used their power in the service of the family and showed due deference to their fathers, husbands or adult sons and only actively stepped into male-dominated arenas like the battlefield or siege negotiations when a male representative was not present. In this manner, Anna Dalassene inadvertently becomes the head of state, Gaita leads the army at Dyrrakhion and Emma defends Otranto. Komnene, on the other hand, pursued the traditionally masculine role of historian in order to preserve the deeds of her father and thus depicted herself in the text acting with modesty in order not to dishonour him and thus cast his actions as the subject of the history in a negative light.

In the introduction I outlined the importance of self-control for the purpose of upholding male authority in Byzantium and how both women and men could cultivate it to achieve virtue. I also argued for the validity of intertextual readings in the work of a highly educated woman-author in a complex and inventive literary culture as a means to understand the rhetorical purpose of representations of gender. Much of this study has therefore come into conflict with earlier scholarship or provided evidence to further nuance the points made by others. The double consciousness of Anna Komnene reveals her to be an author with a commitment to the contemplation of the power of women and the ways in which women could utilise their self-control to manipulate expectations of gendered behaviour and thus protect their family units, and therefore the means by which they came to hold power. The intertextual readings which are made perceptible by linguistic signposts inform the reader of the author's claims that women can move in public arenas like historiography and politics

while still retaining modesty, and thus that women can possess self-control to rival any man of Byzantium. In the case of Anna Dalassene, Komnene even argues that women be privy to states of *pathos* while still wielding power effectively, and thus the depiction of the virtuous regent could be interpreted as a challenge to masculine norms of leadership. These depictions of women from Italy and Byzantium, though deferential to male authority in some regard, do contain elements of female agency. Understanding that this trait alone could be considered provocative to its audience, and indeed did prove so in the early modern period, perhaps there is a hint of irony in the fact that male readers were moved to the point of vitriol at the claim a woman made that she too could write a history, and her choice to make the deeds of other women such a significant part of it.

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